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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LAND IN THE NOVELS OF NGUGI WA THIONG'O

By

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A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
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ABSTRACT

An assessment of the available literary criticism on the work of Ngugi wa Thiong'o reveals that the theme of land which forms the underlying current in the cultural, political and armed conflicts which characterize his writings, especially the first three novels, has enjoyed very little, if any, critical attention. The paucity of literary criticism on this aspect of the writer's work constitutes a glaring omission in literary studies on Ngugi's writings.

A careful analysis of Ngugi's first three novels indicates that the novelist has closely related the moods and sentiments that inform the essays of Homecoming to his creative work. The author himself, in the foreword to that first book of essays, has argued that the essays belong to the 'fictional world' of his first three novels. Consequently, Ngugi's conviction, so persuasively argued in the essays, manifests itself in his imaginative work.

The theme of land expropriation cuts across the whole corpus of Ngugi's writing. Investing land with feminine qualities, the novelist has skilfully brought out the close association between land, as the mother of the tribe, and the feminine characters of his fictional world. By creating strong female characters, in many respects stronger than their male counterparts, the author dramatically realizes the Gikuyu idea of the supremacy of the mother.

Another significant feature of Ngugi's work is the spiritual significance of land. Land, as the storehouse of the ancestors of the tribe, provides a spiritual anchor for the tribe, constituting a link between the dead, the living and the unborn. By removing the Gikuyu from their ancestral land, the Europeans severed the sacred bond between the tribe and its ancestors. This meant that the tribe could no longer pray and offer sacrifices to their ancestors as well as to Murungu (God of the Gikuyu) under the sacred tree. The only alternative open to the tribe was to recapture their land by waging an armed struggle which became known as the Mau Mau war; this guerrilla struggle culminated in the celebration of independence which concludes A Grain of Wheat.

The present study will closely examine the interrelatedness of these themes in Ngugi's first three novels - The River Between, Weep Not Child and A Grain of Wheat - and the artistic purposes to which they are put in the course of their evolution from the simple narrative of The River Between to the more complex work of art that A Grain of Wheat is.

A Note on the Text

The form 'Kikuyu' is the usual spelling used by European writers, which, according to Jomo Kenyatta, is incorrect (see Preface to Facing Mount Kenya, p.xv). The correct form is 'Gikuyu.' For the purpose of this thesis the form 'Gikuyu' will be used consistently throughout, except where the form 'Kikuyu' appears in a quotation, in which case the spelling of the author being quoted will be maintained.

The following abbreviations will be used for quotations used in the text:

R.B. = The River Between
W.N.C. = Weep Not, Child
A.G.W. = A Grain of Wheat
P.B. = Petals of Blood
D.C. = Devil on the Cross
S.L. = Secret Lives and Other Stories
T.D.K. = The Trial of Dedan Kimathi
B.H. = The Black Hermit
T.T.T. = This Time Tomorrow
D.W.P.D. = Detained: The Writer's Prison Diaries

Glossary:

Ahoi: squatters
Gichandi: musical instrument
irua: circumcision or initiation

jembe: hoe

kenda muiyuru: 'the nine that fills.' (In real count this word means ten).

Kiama: Council of elders

Mugumo: Sacred tree

Murungu: The sacred or holy one (God of the Gikuyu)

Ngai: God of the Gikuyu

Njuka: new-comer

uhuru: freedom or independence

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: NGUGI AND COMMITMENT

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's literary achievement, it has often been argued, has been overshadowed by his socio-economic and political concerns. A survey of his writings reveals that this line of argument is not without substance. It therefore becomes incumbent on any student of Ngugi's writings to look at his work against the background of the forces that were brought to bear on the author's personal development, for these formative influences are important in shaping the individual's personality and world view. A study of Ngugi's writings will do well to start with a biographical note which, it is hoped, sheds light on his works and leads to a better understanding of how the author came to hold the views reflected in his works, particularly the novels, the first three of which constitute the primary concern of this study.

Ngugi was born on January 5, 1938[1] in 'Kamiriithu Village, near Limuru in the Kiambu District of Kenya, 12 miles north-east of Nairobi,'[2] just over a year before the outbreak of World War II. This war later became one of the major influences on the novelist's development as reflected in some of his novels. It is significant that most of the participants in the Mau Mau uprisings were ex-servicemen of World War II, who had gained experience in fighting in this war as well as exposure to international views and attitudes.

Another important outcome of World War II was the post-war settlement of Kenya by some of the British soldiers; a number of the settler-farmers that Ngugi writes about are ex-servicemen of the Second World War.

Another important development which had a profound impact on the life of the Gikuyu people took place before the novelist was born: this was the expropriation of Gikuyu land for white settlement, mainly during the period 1902-07.[3] Such dispossession of land which the Gikuyu held to be sacred constitutes the focus of this study; it is the basis of the conflict that characterizes Ngugi's writings, a conflict that assumes various forms ranging over cultural issues such as religion, education and circumcision, and encompassing the military struggle of the Mau Mau against the British crown forces.

Ngugi, like most of the characters in his novels, attended a variety of mission schools and Gikuyu Independent Schools. The life that Ngugi's family led during the time under review was similar in many respects to that of the characters in his novels; the novelist himself has written that:

> I grew up in a small village. My father with his four wives had no land. They lived as tenants-at-will on somebody else's land. Harvests were often poor. Sweetened tea with milk at any time of day was a luxury. We had one meal a day -- late in the evening. Every day the women would go to their scruffy little strips of shamba.[4]

Striking similarities between the novelist's childhood life and that of Njoroge's in Weep Not, Child have prompted critics to claim that his novels are autobiographical. Abdul R. JanMohamed, one of the critics who holds this view, has argued that:

> Weep Not, Child is set in the Kenya of the 1930s and 1950s, and it ends amidst the violence of the Mau Mau War. It is thus the most autobiographical of Ngugi's novels; Njoroge, its child protagonist, is about the same age as Ngugi would have been at that time.[5]

Ngugi came close to confirming this view when he stated in 1973 that the novels, stories and plays 'form my creative autobiography over the last twelve years and touch on ideas and moods affecting me over the same period. My writing is really an attempt to understand my situation in society and in history.'[6] With the novelist himself having made this pronouncement the reader can comfortably draw parallels between the novelist and some of his characters without fearing to read too much into the author's works. Like most of the characters in his novels, Ngugi grew up in a situation where his family was part of the dispossessed masses, who were forced to live at the mercy of the whims of the wealthy landlords; these circumstances helped to bring about the Mau Mau crisis, which is the central subject of at least three of Ngugi's books, Weep Not, Child, A Grain of Wheat and The Trial of Dedan Kimathi.

It is not clear what the word Mau Mau means, but L.S.B. Leakey, in his book Mau Mau and the Kikuyu, has gone so far as to say that, "most of the Kikuyu that I have asked say it is just a 'name without meaning.'"[7] Webster's New World Dictionary, Second College Edition, defines a Mau Mau as 'a member of a secret society of Kikuyu tribesmen in Kenya, organized c.1951 to fight against white rule: both the movement and its suppression were marked by terrorism and violence. Writing in his book entitled Pan-Africanism or Communism George Padmore said of the Mau Mau:

> Although the name has never been satisfactorily defined, as no such word as 'Mau Mau' exists in the Gikuyu language, its socio-economic causes are easier to explain. Mau Mau is not an organized movement with a regular membership, officers and constitution like the Kenya African Union. It is a spontaneous revolt of a declassed section of the African rural population, uprooted from its tribal lands and driven into urban slum life without any hope of gainful employment, due to the absence of an Industrial Revolution able to absorb them as proletarians. All the pseudoanthropological assertion about Mau Mau being a 'religion', is sheer nonsense. Mau Mau hymn singing and oath taking are merely psychological devices borrowed by desperate young men from free masonry and missionary sources to bind their adherents to their cause.[8]

Members of this movement fled to the forests and waged a guerrilla war against the Government, their motivation being repossession of land as well as the regaining of political freedom.

With Mau Mau came the State of Emergency from 1952 to 1962. Ngugi was attending school during this time; unfortunately, emergency regulations forced the closure of many schools and left many students including Ngugi out of school. Some critics, among them Jahn Janheinz, claim that

Ngugi left school 'for the period from 1948 to 1950 when there were no lessons because of Mau Mau.'[9] This information seems somewhat inaccurate, to put it mildly, because the Emergency was not declared until 1952. As L.S.B. Leakey has indicated, 'In September, 1952 it became necessary for the Kenya Government to declare a State of Emergency, as a result of the activities of an organization known as Mau Mau.'[10] While the Emergency came in 1952 there is a certain amount of reason to believe that, as Leakey has continued to argue:

> it was in the latter part of 1948 or early in 1949 that Mau Mau really got under way, and that this was linked with the news that the Duke of Gloucester was coming out to Kenya, as His Majesty's representative, to confer city status upon Nairobi.[11]

It is quite possible that the critics who argue that Ngugi left school for the period from 1948 to 1950 may very well be confusing the closure of Independent Schools, which resulted from the State of Emergency, with the beginning of Mau Mau. Logically, the War must have broken out first and the Emergency occurred later as part of the British Government's attempts to contain it. The State of Emergency was formally declared by the Government, so the dates on which it was declared and lifted can be documented as from 1952 to 1962. It therefore seems logical to conclude that Ngugi could not have left school before 1952. Whatever the date, this particular turn of events had a remarkable impact upon Ngugi's mind. His novels are teeming with school closures and expulsion of students, a further reason which has prompted some critics to argue that his novels are thoroughly autobiographical.

A later incident, which has influenced Ngugi's subject matter took place while he was a student at Makere University in 1962. Here a conference on African Literature brought together African writers with a diversity of views on what African Literature should be. An attempt was made to produce a working definition of African Literature; the wrangling that followed served to underscore the difficulties of any such definition. Other papers read at this conference discussed a variety of issues, ranging over a wide spectrum of social, economic and political subjects as well as the role of literature in that context. These papers must have captured the young Ngugi's attention, judging by his subsequent prolific pronouncements made in various interviews, at conferences, and in his collection of essays, especially such statements as the following one on the role of the writer:

> I believe that the African intellectuals must align themselves with the struggle of the African masses for a meaningful national ideal...Perhaps in a small way, the African writer can help in articulating the feelings behind this struggle.[12]

At an African-Scandinavian Writers Conference, held at Hasselby in 1967, Ngugi said he thought 'it was time that the African writers also started to talk in terms of those workers and peasants.'[13]

Ngugi has discussed his beliefs and commitment fully in his three books of collected essays. In the essays, 'freed from the limitations of fiction,' as Ime Ikiddeh puts it, 'Ngugi makes statements informed and carried through by a passion and intellect which are only in circumscribed evidence in his best creative work.'[14] The essays appear to be, for Ngugi, an integral part of his creative work; he has said of the volume entitled Homecoming:

> The present collection of essays is an integral part of the fictional world of The River Between, Weep Not, Child and A Grain of Wheat. Most of them were written at about the same time as the novels; they have been products of the same moods and touch on similar questions and problems.[15]

Ime Ikiddeh has asserted that Ngugi's essays reveal a militancy not commonly associated with his creative works. Yet Ikiddeh, in the same breath, has conceded that there are limitations to what an author 'can meaningfully communicate through fiction,'[16] for in a novel, however militant a writer is, he has 'to bend to the dictates of artistic propriety before he can make his statement effectively.'[17] In this connection, therefore, the novelist can seldom be as 'direct, didactic and polemical'[18] as an essayist can be. Even so, Ngugi's last two novels -- Petals of Blood and Devil on the Cross -- do reveal a militancy not commonly associated with his earlier creative writings.

The novels of Ngugi fall within that main body of African literature which concerns itself with Africa's initial contact with the West and the problems that have attended adaptation to Western values. The first point of contact appears to have been religion, and the two novels which deal with this initial contact very well are Ngugi's The River Between and Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart. The instantaneous result of this contact was cultural conflict. It is significant that missionaries always asked for a piece of land to build a church. The Africans would grudgingly allocate them a plot in an 'Evil Forest' in the hope that their ancestral spirits in such a place would bring harm to the invaders. This token expropriation of land was to be expanded when the missionaries were, afterwards, joined by administrators, police and settlers. With the administrators came laws governing the use and ownership of the newly acquired land, laws that were often alien to the customs and beliefs of the native peoples.

Two cultures with divergent views on the use and spiritual significance of land were, from the outset, bound on a collision course with each other. The European settlers regarded land as an object of conquest, subjugation and then taming - often for commercial profit -- whereas, for the Gikuyu, land had a spiritual value. As Jomo Kenyatta has indicated, for the Gikuyu:

> Communion with the ancestral spirits is perpetuated through contact with the soil in which the ancestors of the tribe were buried. The Gikuyu consider the earth as the 'mother' of the tribe....[19]

Owing spiritual attachment to the land as to their 'mother' and envisaging it as the shrine where their ancestors are kept by way of burial, the Gikuyu regard removal from their land as a violation of their most sacred and cherished customs. It becomes, as it were, the severance of the umbilical cord that joins them to their 'mother' and to their ancestors. With such an irrevocable bond between the Gikuyu and their land, 'an everlasting oath is to swear by the earth;'[20] this is the most solumn of oaths, a breach of which is the most sacrilegious thing that anybody can do.

The present study intends to investigate in some detail the significance of land and its ever recurrent maternal qualities, as well as examining the associated feminine principle in the novels of Ngugi. Throughout his writings Ngugi sympathizes with his female characters, often endowing them with more decisiveness than their male counterparts. As Judith Cochrane has persuasively argued, the female characters in Ngugi's works are portrayed as the guardians of the tribe. They symbolize the regeneration and continuity of the people. The novelist juxtaposes most of the major male characters with strong female characters, and this has the effect of making their weaknesses stand out. In this regard, the reader sees the main characters through the eyes of their female counterparts.

For the last twenty years Ngugi has been at the forefront of creative writing in East Africa. In all his writings he has been intensely involved in creating a biting commentary on the institutions of power in Kenya. In none of his writings has he been complimentary to the institutions of power, be it the colonial or the post-colonial government run by and for the Kenyans themselves. In this regard he has contended that 'it is not simply a question of some people, be they black, yellow or red, being more wicked than others.'[21] Ngugi sees the position of the artist in society as one upon which a heavy responsibility is imposed, arguing that a writer can never be a neutral or disinterested observer: 'Whether or not he is aware of it, he works reflect one or more aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in a society... What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral.'[22] Pursuant to this conviction, Ngugi, like Chinua Achebe, has argued on a number of occasions that literature or art must be in the service of man, that it must serve a human purpose. By arguing in this manner, Ngugi has rejected the idea of art for art's sake, being convinced that literature should not ignore the big issues that bedevil society. In the title essay to Writers in Politics, Ngugi has argued this point very strongly:

> The product of the writer's imaginative involvement -- what Shakespeare called a mirror unto nature -- becomes a reflection of society: its economic structure, its class formations, its conflicts and contradictions...the conflict and tensions... Hence literature has often given us more and sharper insights into the moving spirit of an era than all the historical and political documents treating the same moments in a society's development.

> The novel, especially in its critical realist tradition, is important in that respect; it pulls apart and it puts together; it is both analytic and synthetic.[23]

Having made his position clear in this way, it is hardly surprising that Ngugi's novels should reveal his deep involvement with what he sees as the major problems of his society. In another essay Ngugi amplified his position on the role of the writer in a changing society, declaring that:

> A writer responds, with his total personality, to a social environment which changes all the time. Being a kind of sensitive needle, he registers, with varying degrees of accuracy and success, the conflicts and tensions in his changing society. Thus the same writer will produce different types of work, sometimes contradictory in mood, sentiment, degree of optimism and even world view. For the writer himself lives in, and is shaped by, history.[24]

Of Ngugi's five novels to the present, the first three deal with pre-independence Kenya, while the last two deal with the country since independence. For the novelist a basic historical reality has changed, and, since he as a writer 'lives in, and is shaped by, history,' he has responded 'with his total personality' to capture such socio-political changes; the result is that the two later novels are markedly different in 'mood and sentiment' in an attempt to capture the changed circumstances.

This study will examine the extent to which Ngugi marries art to commitment in his portrayal of the vices as well as foibles of society. His intense involvement in the concerns of his society forms the focus of critical scrutiny in this thesis. We shall now turn, in the next chapter, to a consideration of the spiritual significance of land in the novelist's work. The earth in Ngugi's works is permeated by a sense of mystery; anything that happens to it impinges directly upon the lives of its inhabitants; for it is the life sustaining force on which the Gikuyu depend for their livelihood.

CHAPTER II

THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF LAND

Land having been mankind's most valuable asset throughout the ages, it is hardly surprising that territorial claims have often led nations to war. Humanity has been and continues to be sustained and nurtured by land, both in food production and mineral wealth. With this in mind land, not unexpectedly, forms the basis of the conflict that invariably pervades Ngugi's writings. In a telling passage from his autobiography the Kenyan leader, Jomo Kenyatta has described the reverential awe in which the Gikuyu people hold their land:

> Owing to the importance attached to the land the system of land tenure was carefully and ceremonially laid down, so as to ensure to an individual or a family group a peaceful settlement on the land they possessed. According to the Gikuyu customary law of land tenure every family unit had a land right of one form or another. While the whole tribe defended collectively the boundary of their territory, every inch of land within it had its owner.[1]

Realizing the significance of land to their very survival, different societies have jealously guarded their territories, the loss of which would mean the loss of dignity and self-respect for the community which inhabits it; more often than not, this would also mean subjugation by another community. Consequently, there exists a sacred bond between man and the soil; sacred because the soil sustains and nurtures man, and also because man, as the Bible tells us, was created from the soil, to which he returns after death:

> And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul:
> And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.
> And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good food; the tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:7-9)

From this process of creation, it is clear that man is an integral part of nature. Plants and animals that surround him provide food for man, who ekes out a living from the sometimes unwilling earth. Consequently, various African communities have designated certain animals or trees as sacred. As John Samuel Mbiti has explained, "the Herero of Southern Africa regard all cattle as sacred, and as having originated from their mythical 'tree of life' from where human and other life came."[2] Significantly, the 'tree of life' or the 'sacred grove' features prominently in Ngugi's The River Between and 'Mugumo' or 'Fig Tree' in Secret Lives. In this sense the 'sacred grove' or the 'sacred tree' symbolizes luxuriance and fecundity; for it is while Mukami is alone in the enveloping darkness of that stormy night under the sacred tree that she discovers her pregnancy. Her solitary excursion to the sacred tree in a wet and stormy night is a form of penance which she must undergo before her prayer is answered. The external storm, which had hitherto been matched by her emotional turbulence, subsides with the realization of her pregnancy, signifying a peaceful resolution to the matrimonial problems which had resulted from her apparent barrenness.

According to the Gikuyu land tenure system, ownership of land was carefully organized. L.S.B. Leakey, a renowned anthropologist, has explained more fully the Gikuyu law and custom concerning land ownership:

> By Kikuyu law and custom, land occupied and owned by other people cannot be acquired by conquest, for if this were done and previous owner forcibly dispossessed, the Kikuyu fully believe that the spirits of the owners would make it impossible for the occupiers to carry out their agricultural activities with any hope of success, or with any hope of the blessing of Ngai, the God of the Kikuyu.[3]

In this regard, the ancestral spirits are the guardians of the land in which they lie buried. If land has to be acquired from another community, then this should be done by peaceful means, thereby procuring the consent of the previous owner.

It is vital to understand the dynamics of the Gikuyu system of land ownership in order to put in perspective their reaction to the expropriation of their land following the advent of European settlement in Kenya at the turn of the nineteenth century. In the view of the Gikuyu any expropriation of their land by invading forces would mean severance of the enduring links which were established when Ngai created Gikuyu and Mumbi, his wife, and settled them on the land that the Gikuyu now inhabit. This bond, which was established during the creation of man from dust, as the Bible tells us, was sealed irrevocably at the time of death when the breath that God blew into man finally took flight, leaving the insensitive flesh only to return to nourish the soil from which it was created.

It is indeed intriguing to note the striking similarity between the Gikuyu creation myth and the Biblical story of creation. According to the Gikuyu myth of creation, from the beginning of things Ngai, when 'he was dividing the world into territories and giving them to the various races and nations that populate the globe, gave them a Gikuyu territory full of the good things'[4] of life, as Jomo Kenyatta puts it. Obtaining good nourishment from the land, the people rapidly increased; soon, the need arose for more land, the Gikuyu land having become densely populated. Owing to their belief in ancestral spirits and their guardianship of the land they bequeathed to their descendants, the Gikuyu could not raid the neighboring tribes for more land. For them such conduct would be an exercise in futility: the ancestral spirits of the raided people would not bless the land and its productivity would be seriously undermined. The only option left to them was to purchase land from their neighbors through the barter system. Having bought land in this way ceremonial proceedings would be arranged where an animal would be sacrificed to propitiate the ancestral spirits of the former owner, so that they would not return to plague the new owner, thus rendering his newly acquired piece of land barren. The blood of the sacrificial animal and the undigested contents of its entrails are sprinkled along the borders of the newly acquired piece of land; this is significant in that it has a cleansing effect, appeasing the spirits as well as establishing a sacred bond between the new owner and the piece of land he has acquired. Any breach of this bond by any transgressor would result in the spilling of blood; in this regard the blood of the sacrificial animal signifies the shedding of the blood of anybody who would undermine the sacred trust between the land and its owner.

According to the Gikuyu creation myth Gikuyu and Mumbi had nine daughters and no sons. However, as Charity W. Waciuma has shown, there are other views concerning the number of Gikuyu's daughters:

> In fact, although this is how we always tell the story of our origin, nine is not the correct number. There are still others, Nyambura, Wangeci and so on. But we call any number beyond nine 'kenda muiyuru,' — the nine that fills (completes). It is unlucky to count people accurately or by pointing a finger at them since this may cause one of them to die. When there was at last a census in Kenya in August, 1962, the politicians had to make special appeals to us to forget this old taboo.[5]

Realizing that his "nine" daughters had no men to marry them, Gikuyu went to Kirinyaga (the present Mount Kenya) - the mountain of God, to present his case before his creator, and on his return he found "nine" young suitors at his home whom he proceeded to marry to his daughters. In this way Gikuyu's nine daughters became the founding mothers of the nine Gikuyu clans. It is, thus, significant to note that Ngugi's writings are pervaded by strong feminine qualities; it is apparently a deliberate effort on the part of the author to depict the supremacy of the mother among the Gikuyu in line with their creation myth. This aspect and other elements embodied in what may be described as the feminine principle in Ngugi's writings will be examined in some detail in a later chapter.

The creation myth affords a very strong motif in The River Between and Weep Not, Child. The peoples' belief and dependence on this myth when they want to regain their land makes them inactive, since, according to the myth, a son will rise and lead them to victory. This belief in the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy leads Waiyaki in The River Between and Njoroge in Weep Not, Child to do very little in the way of active and deliberate action designed to lead their people to a reclamation of their land. Ironically, these young men see themselves as the 'messiahs' envisioned in Mugo wa Kibiro's prophecy, which should have been reason enough for them to agitate even more to make the prophecy come true.

Sometimes Ngugi uses a physical landscape to symbolize the moral and psychological landscape of his society. This is particularly so in The River Between. When the novel opens we are told that 'The two ridges lay side by side. One was Kameno, the other was Makuyu. Between them was a valley... A river flowed through the valley of life' (R.B. p.1). This physical dichotomy in the landscape foreshadows the psychological polarity of Chege and those on his side on the one hand and Joshua and the Christian converts on the other; the river and the valley symbolize the middle ground that Waiyaki and Nyambura attempt to strike at their peril. The first four paragraphs of the novel, and the powerful physical landscape they invoke provide a microcosmic view of the entire novel: the division is there, the antagonism is there, and the potential for unity is there -- all embodied in the description of the physical landscape.

When the novel opens no land has been expropriated and the serenity that permeates the ridges, which Ngugi describes as the 'sleeping lions which never woke...' and, instead, 'just slept, the big deep sleep of their Creator' (R.B. p.1) indicates that the ridges are in harmony with each other, with the Honia River serving as a vein of life which nurtures and sustains life on the ridges. We are told that the river 'flows with no apparent haste' (R.B. p.1) and this bespeaks the ease and peacefulness of life on the ridges. Traditional customs are still intact, with circumcision still ritually performed as an expression of manhood and courage. The people take pride in ancient heroes, as well as in the mythical origin of the villages. Physical courage is highly prized and knowledge of tribal secrets, which is seen as a mark of noble birth, is treasured. The ritual purity of the tribe, enacted through circumcision, remains intensely alive.

Visits by European officials and missionary agents are rare. Land is still firmly in the hands of its rightful owners, and only small isolated plots have been acquired by missionaries for the purpose of building their churches. The acquisition of land by missionaries was a peaceful process. Missionaries served as front men in the process of colonization. As Obierika puts it in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart:

> The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishess and allowed him to stay. Now he has our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.[6]

Mission stations became the centres from which Western ideas radiated. The main technique used by the missionaries and District Commissioners was to drive a wedge among the people in order to undermine their unity. This divide and rule tactic is what Achebe's Igbo character, Obierika, calls putting 'a knife on the things that held' the traditional societies together, thus creating many cracks in a fragilely balanced traditional society; the result of this was the creation of religious charlatans, like Joshua in The River Between, whose obsession with the new religious creed is fanatical, and Nwoye in Things Fall Apart, who deserts his father and people to join the new dispensation which offers an alternative to the old order. These characters symbolize that group of Africans who became disenchanted with the old way of life, being attracted to the rather lucrative Western way of life which offered cash remuneration and a religion which promised a rosy after-life in Heaven. This was the period when the Mau Mau war lay in the unseen future.

The Mau Mau war was a war of liberation whose sole aim was to reclaim the land which had been expropriated by the Europeans. 'Political freedom', in the words of Eustace Palmer, 'in Kenya became synonymous with repossession of the land.'[7] The Mau Mau, usually dubbed by its detractors 'a reversion to African paganism and barbarism in its oathing and advocacy of violence as a legitimate political tool,'[8] was a resistance movement determined to regain both political freedom and land by means of armed confrontation.

The underlying themes which provide fundamental links in Ngugi's first four novels initially found expression in The River Between, his first novel, although it was the second to enjoy the courtesy of publication. The speed with which change came to Africa in the twentieth century brought about sharp contrasts between traditional life patterns and assumptions; ancestral and modern ways of living, traditional religion and Christianity have clashed violently in the process. The most urgent need is for unity to enable society to retain the positive aspects of its traditions in order to withstand the disintegrative force of power groups and vested interests whose pressures inevitably deepen rather than alleviate social injustice. The reforms that came from the West through the settlers and missionaries were imposed on the indigenous populations without the approval or even acceptance of the latter. These reforms could not be just if they were not acceptable to the people for whom they were intended. Reforms must emanate from popular movements and programs, for as David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe have argued:

> There is an innate wisdom in working folk that needs to be fostered and given a sense of direction by far-sighted, selfless leadership. Unless dynamic and humane individuals rally support for more constructive policies, demagogues and fanatics like Kabonyi and Joshua will dictate the directions in which society is to move.[9]

The image that links the two ridges, together with the river which both divides and unites them and from which the book derives its title, is fundamental, recurring as it does, as the central statement and subtle inference of a society divided against itself. When Chege and Waiyaki, his son, reached the sacred grove, 'Kameno and Makuyu were no longer antagonistic. They had merged into one area of beautiful land'(R.B. p.19). The momentary calm and apparent union of the antagonistic ridges which Chege and Waiyaki observed provides a potential for unity between the ridges. As Ngugi tells us, Honia means 'cure or bring-back-to-life' (R.B. p.1),[10] while Douglas G. Killam tells us that "the word 'Honia' means 'cure' or 'will to live.'"[11] In this sense the River Honia serves a prophylactic purpose for the socio-political malady of the ridges. As it meanders and its waters gurgle through the hills, it provides the means of livelihood to the surrounding country. Significantly River Honia is a perennial river, suggesting regeneration and continuity. It permeates the life of the surrounding ridges, giving them a sense of mystery. After his second birth, Waiyaki 'came out clean' (R.B. p.15) from his dip in the River Honia, suggesting that the water of the river has a purifying effect. On the other hand the river serves as a ritual participant in the circumcision ceremonies. Inextricably intertwined with the whole life of the clan, the river symbolizes their very heart-beat. Initiates are dipped into it and, serving as an anaesthetic, it kills or 'cures' the pain of circumcision. However, it is not without a twist of irony added to it, for it annoys Waiyaki for its apparent complicity with the Europeans for carrying away the soil. Upon reflection, however, Waiyaki realizes the absurdity of his thought, when expressed in such terms, and comes to laugh at himself.

The insidious network of local forces permitting the expropriation of land is comparable to the many tiny rivulets eroding the soil into Honia River: 'From the scoops flowed little narrow streams that ran through the grass. They mingled and flowed on to join the main stream, like a small stream, like Honia' (R.B. p.75). At the end of the novel the river still flows and it therefore becomes a metaphor for the many unresolved possibilities: 'And Honia went on flowing through the valley of life, throbbing, murmuring an unknown song' (R.B. p.173) like the solitary reaper in William Wordsworth's poem of the same title. The unknown song suggests the elusive nature of the problems that bedevil the society under review. Nobody knows their solution, and until a solution is found, they, like the perennial river, will continue to plague society.

In terms of the social forces at work in the society under scrutiny, the river seems to epitomise the role Waiyaki is to play. As much as the river is both a uniting and a dividing force, Waiyaki tries to unite the ridges and yet turns out to be an unwitting divisive force; unfortunately, he gets caught in the cross-fire of antagonistic socio-political forces. He is a metaphoric embodiment of conflicting forces; he is both redeemer and destroyer, the saviour and reconciler, and, finally, though inadvertently, the divider. As Eustace Palmer points out, many critics dismiss Waiyaki as "a modern, progressive, and idealistic individual engaged in a losing battle against reactionary forces and inevitably 'facing the fate of those wise before their time.'"[12] However, as Palmer concedes, a careful reading of the novel 'reveals that Waiyaki, like Ngotho in Weep Not, Child, is a tragic and an enormously impressive hero, whose downfall is caused not only by the forces ranged against him, but also by his own weaknesses.'[13] Waiyaki's intentions are well meant, but unfortunately he gets caught in a maze of socio-political forces which prove to be more than he can handle. As a lover to Nyambura as well as an outstanding personality in the camp of the traditionalists in whose name oaths are administered in the camp of the traditionalists, he is bound on a collision course with both sides. Each side views him as a collaborator with its adversaries, and this proves to be his undoing.

The imagery of the ridges and the river is only one of the numerous land motifs that pervade The River Between, giving it a sense of pattern and unity. G.D. Killam argues that 'the progressive alienation of the Gikuyu from the land by white colonists' is mentioned in the book. The critic goes on to contend that: 'This is the principal theme of all of Ngugi's writing. Yet it is little more than a leitmotif in this book.'[14] If indeed the issue of land is only 'little more than a leitmotif' it is because the book covers the initial period of contact between Europeans and Africans. At this stage the systematic expropriation of land which we see in Ngugi's later novels had not yet occurred. In spite of this the novel seems to derive its sense of form and unity from the powerful geographical setting of the river and the ridges which become a metaphorical representation of a society at odds with itself. There is repeated mention of the 'sacred grove' throughout the novel, and the journey that

Chege and Waiyaki make to this spot is constantly mentioned either directly or just alluded to. Another important locale, which constitutes one of the central land motifs, is the special place near the Honia River where most of the crucial episodes in the book are enacted. This is the place where we first encounter Muthoni and Nyambura discussing circumcision. The discussion assumes more significance, considering that the ground upon which they stand is the circumcision arena, where both Waiyaki and Muthoni are later circumcised in the same ritual with many others. It is here, the location of Waiyaki's circumcision, where the first love scene takes place, to which Nyambura harks back from time to time, and it is the spot on which Waiyaki and Nyambura consummate their love. And it is here and the adjoining area where the fateful gathering called by Waiyaki, takes place. Sometimes, Ngugi spells out the links between the various actions which focus attention on this place, at other times he leaves it to the readers to realize these links for themselves through the powerful geographical awareness he has already created. These allusions bind the loose ends and focus attention on this arena which has almost assumed mystical proportions by the end of the book. The boyhood fight between Kinuthia and Kamau is recalled on a number of occasions whenever their relationship is in question. The prophetic forebodings of Mugo wa Kibiro and those of Chege are invoked as further points of reference throughout the narrative. The prophecy of the emergence of a saviour lies behind the rivalry between Waiyaki and Kabonyi. Kabonyi, a backslider from the Christian camp, was a potent opponent to Waiyaki, for both of them were the only aspirants privy to Mugo wa Kibiro's prophecy. Kabonyi has experienced both ways of life, and therefore has a double vision, Using the best ammunition from both sides, he is better equipped for the fight than Waiyaki. So, as Chinua Achebe would have put it, 'Like Satan [the fallen angel] a spell in heaven had armed him [Kabonyi] with unfair insights.'[15] For this reason he has an 'unfair' edge over Waiyaki in their contest for Mugo wa Kibiro's vision. The total effect of recalling the words of the seers is reinforced by the ritual enactment of circumcision. The traditional preparations for this rite are emphatically juxtaposed with Christian ceremonies, and twice in the novel circumcision coincides with Christmas celebrations.

The rite of circumcision is of immense importance to the Gikuyu people. The basic requirements of this ritual is that the boys must undergo circumcision while the girls undergo clitoridectomy. The cutting of the sexual organ symbolizes separation from childhood, ushering the initiates into adulthood. In a way, it parallels the cutting of the umbilical cord at birth. With this operation the initiate is born into a new state. The shedding of blood, which soaks into the soil, binds the initiates mystically to the living-dead, who are living symbolically in the ground. It is the blood of a new birth. The physical pain which the initiates are encouraged to endure, is the beginning of their training for the hardships which they will encounter in later life. The making of offerings and the pouring of libation to the living-dead underscore and renew the links between the visible and the invisible worlds. Visits to the sacred tree (the sacred grove) in The River Between are reminders of the religious life, as, similarly, is a symbolic visit to the living-dead and the spirits who are believed to live there. In this sense, therefore, the sacred tree constitutes the shrine of the Gikuyu ancestors: Ngotho's inspired story about the origin of the land brings out this point succinctly:

> And the creator who is also called Murungu took Gikuyu and Mumbi from his holy mountain. He took them to the country of ridges near Siriana and there stood on a big ridge before he finally took them to Mukuruwe wa Gathanga about which you have heard so much. But he had shown them all the land -- yes, children, God showed Gikuyu and Mumbi all the land and told them, 'This land I hand over to you. O Man and Woman it's yours to rule and till in serenity sacrificing only to me, your God, under my sacred tree (W.N.C. pp. 27-28).

In this regard, therefore, a visit to or a sacrifice beneath the sacred tree is communion with God and ancestral spirits. With this in mind, it is hardly surprising that Mukami in 'Mugumo' in Secret Lives makes a sentimental journey to the sacred tree when her marriage is endangered by her apparent barrenness. That journey in the stormy night is a potent appeal to the highest authority in Gikuyu religious life.

Fittingly, her plea is heard and answered, and, significantly, she discovers her pregnancy under the sacred tree. The sacred tree has given her a touch of life. To this end, the sacred tree symbolizes regeneration and fecundity.

The essence of the rite of circumcision does not lie solely in the physical operation of cutting the sexual organ. It is its psychological significance that is important. It is this aspect which Jomo Kenyatta meant when he wrote:

> The real argument lies not in the defence of the surgical operation or its details, but in the understanding of a very important fact in the tribal psychology of the Gikuyu, namely that the operation is regarded as the essence of the institution which has enormous educational, social, moral and religious implications.... The overwhelming majority of [the Gikuyu] believe that it is the secret aim of those who attack this centuries-old custom to disintegrate their social order and thereby hasten their Europeanization. The abolition of irua will destroy the tribal symbol which identifies the age-groups, and prevent the Gikuyu from perpetuating that spirit of collectivism and national solidarity which they have been able to maintain from time immemorial.[16]

It is evident that circumcision is a sacred custom, and the place where it is performed is sanctified by the blood of the initiates as it seeps into the soil. This provides a link between the living and the dead who lie buried in the land. It also brings back to mind the significance of the important place beside Honia River where circumcision and other important activities of the clan were performed. Circumcision, like land, has been used by the Gikuyu for ages as an instrument of social cohesion. We have seen earlier that the Gikuyu own land individually or as members of individual families, but when there is a threat they defend their land collectively. So land is a very important symbol of unity. In a similar way circumcision is an instrument of social cohesion. During circumcision tribal secrets are passed on to the initiates, and it becomes a breach of trust and a betrayal of the tribe to disclose these secrets, particularly to the uncircumcized and foreigners. In this connection, there is unity among those who have been initiated into adulthood. During the actual operation there is dancing and rejoicing, both of which serve to strengthen the solidarity of the community, and to underscore its unity; later, these elements become very important when the conflict we see in The River Between assumes violent proportions in Weep Not, Child and A Grain of Wheat. The oath-taking ceremonies then become of crucial importance.

Initiation is in two parts; the first part, primarily, being the physical operation while the second one is educational. The educational aspect is very important to the community in that it exposes the initiates to all aspects of their society. It is a deliberate process of education conducted by the elders of the community. The first part, the physical operation, is important in that the blood that is shed in the process establishes a sacred or religious bond between the initiates and the land, and, by extension, to their ancestors who lie buried in the land.

The different attitudes of Europeans and Africans towards land were largely responsible for the violent conflict that followed the advent of Europeans into Kenya. For the African land was a sacred possession where his ancestors were buried while for the European land was an economic asset gained through conquest. It was this conquest and the forcible removal of Africans from what they considered their rightful land which embittered them. A.R. JanMohamed makes this point clear in the following words:

> At first the process of land alienation was piecemeal, but in 1921 the colonial court ruled that all land, even that which had previously been put aside for African 'reserves', was now Crown land and that all 'natives' were to be considered tenants-at-will on land that they had owned for generations.[17]

This probably answers G.D. Killam's contention that the expropriation of land in The River Between 'is little more than a leitmotif.' The River Between deals with the initial 'piecemeal' alienation of land, and considering that this novel is set in the early 1920s to the early 1930s, it is probable that the effects of the 1921 colonial court ruling had not been seriously felt. In any case, Ngugi probably decided that it was sufficient to use the physical geographical features to give his novel its form and unity and then hint at the appropriation of land as an introduction, knowing that he was going to deal with this subject in more detail in subsequent works.

JanMohamed goes on to argue that the conflict based on ownership of land was accentuated by the differences inherent in the European and African modes of production. He asserts that the European system was commercial, which it was, while the African one was subsistence farming, which did not offer the means of production for sale. However, it would seem that differences in modes of production would not in themselves have caused so much bitterness, nor would they have led to so much loss of life. The main problem which led to the violent conflict was the severance of the spiritual bond between the Africans and their land. The removal of the Gikuyus from their land was like cutting the umbilical cord which joined them to their ancestors. They were then herded into overcrowded reserves, and to induce them to offer their labor on the wage market the settlers introduced taxes. This created a situation where the 'natives' would need money to pay taxes. The Africans were also not allowed to grow cash crops which would enable them to acquire money in order to pay the tax. Crops such as pyrethrum, coffee and tea were the preserve of the white settlers.

The disinheritance caused a socio-cultural upheaval that has pre-occupied Ngugi's thinking, causing him to devote so many of his writings to it. He hardly ever writes anything without returning to this theme. Jomo Kenyatta has aptly argued that culture has no meaning apart from the social organization of life on which it is built. So when the settlers took away the land from the Gikuyu, they were in fact cutting away the foundations on which the social, moral and economic life of the Gikuyu was based. To this end, the Gikuyu character in the novels of Ngugi is in fact the Gikuyu society in microcosm.

Weep Not, Child, like The River Between, deals with a crucial phase in Gikuyu, Kenyan, and indeed African experience. The resentment against the expropriation of land has, as David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe have put it, reached a 'menacing pitch.'[18] Paul Maina, in his book, Six Mau Mau Generals, estimates that about a quarter of the entire Gikuyu population had been forced 'to leave their family homes by 1948.'[19] Restrictions imposed on farming activities in the 'native reserves' were crippling. Men returning from the Second World War had seen too 'much of social intercourse in the world at large ever again to accept tamely the repressive conditions they found in their own country. Demands for political emancipation were in the air,'[20] as Cook and Okenimkpe have stated. These two critics have argued that Weep Not, Child is a 'novel of challenge. Most immediately it challenges Kenyan youth to identify the powerfully positive elements in their heritage.'[21] It challenges a whole age-group to refuse to sit on the fence or retreat from a complex situation into self-pity and despair. In the eyes of the young, such as Boro, Ngotho's age-group lacked the foresight and determination, and so failed to stand up against colonial and elitist appropriation of land. Despite this failure to unite against a take-over by invading interests, Ngotho's age group retained a certain degree of integrity. Their inactive stance is to be preferred to that of out-right traitors like Jacobo. On the contrary Boro's age-group has united and fought.

Ngugi presents characters who are assailed by forces beyond their control, and sometimes even beyond their understanding. The author has invested a good deal of understanding in creating the figures of Jacobo and Howlands; however, he displays little, if any, sympathy for these go-getters. On the other hand, the author invites a sympathetic understanding for Ngotho, who is broken by the repression that has become the order of the day. What is even more pathetic is the fatalistic logic of his generation in imagining that the land crisis caused by the new administration would be solved with the passage of time: 'Would these people ever go? But had not the old Gikuyu seer said that they would eventually return the way they had come?' (W.N.C. p.36). The prophesied people 'with clothes like butterflies' (R.B. p.22) came, unresisted, and the elders waited passively for the arrival of a son whose 'duty shall be to lead and save the people' (R.B. p.24). In a biting comment to his father, Boro had this to say: 'How can you continue working for a man who has taken your land? How can you go on serving him?' (W.N.C. p.30).

If Ngotho is a sad reminder of the demoralizing effect of servile compliance with the forces which degrade his people, Njoroge, his youngest son, embodies an even more negative passivity which repudiates the example offered by Mau Mau in its campaign for corporate rights against all odds. Rather than face the gruelling situation he is even prepared to betray the fight by contemplating suicide. Yet, when the novel ends Njoroge is given a chance of a new beginning.

As Chege tells Waiyaki in The River Between, the Gikuyu believe that Murungu (God) bequeathed the land to them at the beginning of time, and thus Ngotho, like Chege, hands down the myth to his children in Weep Not, Child. Land has, from time immemorial, been the key factor in the unity, cohesion and strength of the family, linking the living with the dead in an unbroken chain. In this connection Ngotho sees himself as having been robbed of his very heritage:

> And yet he felt the loss of the land even more keenly than Boro, for to him it was a spiritual loss. When a man is severed from the land of his ancestors, where would he sacrifice to the Creator? How could he come into contact with the founder of the tribe, Gikuyu or Mumbi? (W.N.C. p.84).[22]

Ngotho's musings call to mind Murungu's instructions to Gikuyu and Mumbi:

> 'This land I hand over to you. O Man and Woman it's yours to rule and till in serenity sacrificing only to me, your God, under my sacred tree' (W.N.P. pp. 27-8).

The serenity in which Murungu instructed Gikuyu and his wife (and, by implication, their descendants) to live in is being disturbed. Removal from their land means that the Gikuyu will no longer sacrifice to their God under His 'sacred tree.' This amounts to a very serious breach of their peace and custom.

The younger generation in their new political organizations have become conscious that all human beings have an ancestral right over a given piece of land on this earth. Njeri, one of Ngotho's wives, who is also one of the mother figures in the novel, gives in the following terms an enlightened analysis of the situation described in Weep Not, Child:

> 'The white man makes a law or a rule. Through that rule or law or what you may call it, he takes away the land and imposes many laws on the people concerning that land and many other things, all without people agreeing first as in the old ways of the tribe. Now a man rises and opposes that law which made right the taking away of the land. Now that man is taken by the same people who made the laws against which that man is fighting. He is tried under those alien rules. Now tell me who is that man who can win even if the angels of God were his lawyers? (W.N.C. pp.84-5).

For Ngotho, Mr. Howlands is the ever-present perpetrator of the loss he has suffered. Ironically, the two men's feelings for land hold them incongruously together.

> Not that Mr. Howlands stopped to analyse his feelings towards him. He just loved to see Ngotho working in the farm; the way the old man touched the soil, almost fondling, and the way he tended the young tea plants as if they

> were his own....Ngotho was too much a part of the farm to be separated from it (W.N.C. p.33).

It is interesting to observe the two men's attitudes toward land, as well as toward each other. They have an ambivalent relationship: they both love and hate each other. Superficially, they are united by land and yet, at a deeper level, the same piece of land divides them irrevocably. While Ngotho is at one with the land he works on, Howlands triumphs over it, possesses it as a conqueror:

> Ngotho felt responsible for whatever happened to this land. He owed it to the dead, the living and the unborn of his line, to keep guard over this shamba. Mr. Howlands always felt a certain amount of victory whenever he walked through it all. He alone was responsible for taming this unoccupied wilderness (W.N.C. p.35).

From this quotation it is clear that Ngotho feels a collective responsibility towards the piece of land he works on. The spiritual significance of that land to him is clear: it provides an irrevocable connection between the dead, the living and the unborn. It is on this piece of land that he should offer sacrifices to his ancestors, for it is here where they were buried. The belief in life-after-death is an integral part of African religious life. For this reason the living feel obligated and, indeed, accountable to the ancestors who have left the physical world to join the spirit world. It is believed that anyone who desecrates the land bequeathed to him by his ancestors will be punished by the ancestral spirits, and may even bring misfortune on the whole community. In some cases African communities may carve sculptures and keep them as objects of reverence. These are physical manifestations of the spirit world of their ancestors. Generally, they believe that the ancestral spirits keep a watchful eye on the activities of the living. It is for this reason that Ngotho regards with so much reverence the piece of land which his forebears bequeathed to him, and of which Howlands has dispossessed him.

The two men's relationship is dominated by hatred: 'Mr. Howlands always felt he would come to grips with Ngotho. Ngotho was his foe' (W.N.C. p. 111). The enmity between them finally explodes into a physical confrontation resulting in Ngotho's physical castration, an act which becomes a metaphor for the emasculation of the community of which Ngotho is a part. The bread winner's masculinity, the symbol of strength and control in the family, has been destroyed, after which Ngotho's family falls apart. Before his castration Ngotho was not only firmly in control of his family but he was also the envy of his peers:

> The feeling of oneness was a thing that most distinguished Ngotho's household from many other polygamous families. Njeri and Nyokabi went to the shamba or market together. Sometimes they agreed amongst themselves that while one did that job the other would do this one. This was attributed to Ngotho, the centre of the home. For if you have a stable centre, then the family will hold (W.N.C. pp. 45-6).

Tragically, evil circumstances tear apart this hitherto model family in the neighbourhood. Ngotho's aspirations and dreams are in the long run unfulfilled: 'He had all his life lived under the belief that something big would happen' (W.N.C. p.44). Instead, he is constantly undermined and finally paralyzed by his son's anger and contempt: "'You know how bitter he [Boro] is with father,'" Kamau reminded Njoroge, "'because he says it was through the stupidity of our fathers that the land had been taken'" (W.N.C. p.47). In this way, Ngotho, like Waiyaki at the end of The River Between and Mugo in A Grain of Wheat, is increasingly weighed down by a sense of guilt. He succumbs to all of Boro's recriminations and is bowed under the shame of having failed his own sons: 'He had not wanted to be accused by a son any more because when a man was accused by the eyes of a son who had been to war and had witnessed the death of a brother he felt guilty' (W.N.C. p.83). Even before this misfortune befell him, life had become meaningless to him, divorced as he had been from the thing he valued most. Boro further accused his father of failure to act when Njeri and Kori were detained for breaking the curfew orders: "'And you again did nothing'" (W.N.C. p.92). Having already condemned himself for cowardice, he has nothing else to say or do but to crouch in a prolonged agony of self-abasement:

> He felt like crying, but the humiliation and pain he felt had a stunning effect. Was he a man any longer, he who had watched his wife and son taken away because of breaking the curfew without a word of protest? Was this cowardice? It was cowardice, cowardice of the worst sort (W.N.C. p.91).

The land problem has been a major concern to Ngugi, as indeed it has been to other Kenyan writers such as Jomo Kenyatta, Charity Waciuma and L.S.B. Leakey, to mention only a few. Some of the relevant passages on land by Jomo Kenyatta and L.S.B. Leakey have been quoted earlier in this chapter to illustrate their concern about the land question. One more passage by Charity Waciuma will further serve to illustrate this point. In an impassioned statement C. Waciuma has put it this way:

> Land which could not be given away. Land which meant everything to the tribe. Land which belonged to the Gikuyu. Land, land, the precious land. The land of our forefathers. They coveted our land.[23]

For the Kenyan writer, particularly Ngugi, land constitutes the very essence of the people's life. The conflict which assumes violent dimensions in Weep Not, Child, A Grain of Wheat and The Trial of Dedan Kimathai is based on ownership of land and the need to repossess the land which has been expropriated from the Gikuyu. In differing degrees The River Between and Weep Not, Child deal with the land problem, which, in addition to being a socio-economic and political problem, has also become a moral dilemma. Jomo Kenyatta once made a rather humorous comment about the way land was acquired from the Gikuyu, observing that: 'When the white man came he had the Bible and we had the land. He taught us to pray with our eyes closed. When we opened them, we had the Bible, and he had the land.'[24] It is undoubtedly true that the Gikuyu land with all its spiritual associations was expropriated through the use of an ecclesiastical conspiracy. The exploitation of the people's deep-seated religious beliefs to hoodwink them in order to deprive them of their land has rendered Christianity suspect -- and, indeed, a constant object of attack in Africa -- for its apparent complicity with the European administrations which came, took over the land and passed laws to legalize the dispossession of the 'native' owners who yet retained their mystical sense of the earth's sanctity.

The cultural conflict, already hinted at in the present chapter, and political conflict are some of Ngugi's major preoccupations in his writings, and like land, they deserve serious analytical attention. The retention of the mythical sense of the earth's sanctity by the 'native' owners gave rise to the cultural and political conflicts which culminated in the outbreak of the Mau Mau war which forms the subject of critical scrutiny in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

CULTURAL CONFLICT AND THE MAU MAU

In the previous chapter we showed the radically different attitudes of Africans and Europeans towards land. We have seen how these differing viewpoints led to cultural conflict in The River Between, resulting in open hostility between the rival groups. Reaching a climax, this hostility culminates in an armed conflict which constitutes the subject of Weep Not, Child and A Grain of Wheat. The present chapter seeks to explore in considerable detail this clash of cultures and the war to which it led. Limiting the scope of discussion to Ngugi's first three novels, we shall examine the nature of this cultural struggle from its initial stages, tracing it as far as the military conflict in which it culminated.

When The River Between begins we are given a strong geographic division. The two ridges, described by the novelist as 'the sleeping lions,' appear antagonistic, thus creating a sense of the hostility that is to come later. We saw in chapter two that the River Honia, which both divides and unites, is symbolic of the role that Waiyaki, the protagonist, plays in the novel. The physical division of the landscape then becomes a metaphor for the subsequent social conflict between the Christians in Makuyu and those who have stuck to the old ways of life in Kameno.

Ngugi's reliance on nature, in this case a description of physical landscape, is undoubtedly attributable to the influence of D.H. Lawrence and to a lesser extent that of Joseph Conrad. Of D.H. Lawrence Ngugi has said:

> I felt with D.H. Lawrence, although the situation, the geographical situation, and even the moral situation he is writing about, are in some ways remote to me, that he is able to go into the spirit of things. You know I felt as if he was entering into the soul of the people, and not only of the people, but even of the land, of the countryside, of things like plants, of the atmosphere.[1]

The interest Ngugi has in D.H. Lawrence is manifest in the way he expresses harmony with nature. His insistent observation of the many physical details of agriculture, labour, plains, ridges, rivers, groves and seasons, especially in The River Between, brings out succinctly as well as vividly his fascination with nature. Like D.H. Lawrence, it is his way of going into the spirit of things, his way of entering into the souls of the communities which inhabit this natural landscape and the atmosphere which envelopes them.

Ngugi uses descriptions of nature to penetrate into and dissect the psychological landscape of the community under review. As we have seen in chapter two, the physical division of landscape in The River Between symbolizes the division of the tribe under the pressure of Western ideas. Viewing significant aspects of life such as circumcision, religion and most importantly, land, in different ways the two antagonistic groups vie with each other over which of the two cultures is the better. The novelist develops this cultural conflict to a political level where there is physical combat in Weep Not, Child and A Grain of Wheat.

The plot of The River Between draws upon themes concerning a young man's education and messianic experience. Like Weep Not, Child, The River Between traces the development of a child through school into the world of work as a teacher. The book treats the important subject of cultural transition. The setting of the novel is allegorical: the external conflict that we encounter in the novel is a manifestation of the psychological conflict taking place in the society under review. As the novel progresses Kameno, the home of the prophet Mugo wa Kibiro and his descendant, Waiyaki, the central protagonist in the novel, emerges as the centre for those who want to safeguard the cultural purity of the tribe; Makuyu, on the other hand, becomes the stronghold of the Christian converts led by Joshua. The entire Gikuyu culture is seen to be in a state of flux. Joshua's followers on Makuyu have renounced various aspects of their traditional tribal culture as either evil or pagan. The tribal bickering that ensues is emblematic of the problem of cultural transition. The resistance to change in Kameno is evidently meant to reflect the conservative nature of man.

Characterization is stylized in order to mirror the extreme clash between the desire for cultural purity and the contrary desire to abrogate traditional values. Among the older generation, which provides the secondary characters in the novel, the opposition to cultural change is embodied in Chege, Waiyaki's father, while Joshua, a religious charlatan, vehemently advocates the abandonment of tribal ways of life. Chege, a minor prophet, is incensed by the people's disregard of his prophetic forebodings. While opposing European influence on his people, he is realistic enough to acknowledge the 'technological superiority of European society,'[2] as JanMohamed informs us. Consequently, he sends his son to attend a mission school in order to master Western knowledge without absorbing its evils. What Chege does in The River Between is similar to what Ezeulu does in Arrow of God -- and, as in Chinua Achebe's novel, the experiment backfires. Chege is dedicated to the preservation of his people's culture by ensuring its survival through the absorption of useful aspects of Western culture. However, the crucial mistake he makes is that he does not realize that education is a process of acculturation, Chege, therefore, like Ezeulu, sends his son to a mission school little realizing that he cannot have it both ways. On the other hand, Joshua, an over-zealous convert of the Christian Church who has become self-righteous and puritanical, renounces Gikuyu culture because of what he considers to be its dirty, heathen and evil practices. Thus, Joshua is committed to salvation through Christianity. Ngugi balances these cultural polar opposites with the dynamic attitudes of their children: Waiyaki and Joshua's two daughters, Muthoni and Nyambura. The younger generation, unlike their parents, try to synthesize the two ways of life in their own different ways.

Muthoni's touching story represents a disastrous attempt to combine what she considers to be the best aspects of both cultures. In what amounts to a rebellion against her parents she decides to undergo circumcision. She does so because according to the Gikuyu the rite of circumcision is a very important act of purification and rebirth, Muthoni believes that a Gikuyu girl can only become a woman through the ritual of circumcision. Unable to comprehend how girls in other cultures become women without going through a similar ceremony, Muthoni is convinced that for her to become a woman she must go through that ritual passage. Circumcision was important to her for its educational value. Knowledge of tribal secrets is transmitted to the younger generation during circumcision. Sex education is also passed on to the youth during the initiation ceremonies. So for Muthoni to become a woman rooted in the traditions of her society she must undergo the initiation rites.

Believing firmly that no substantial contradictions exist between the basic tenets of Christianity and traditional (indigenous) culture, she tries to synthesize the two cultures by running away from home to undergo the ritual under the tutelage of her aunt who lives in Kameno. Unfortunately, she dies from an infection contracted during surgery. Besides depicting the social consequences of the cultural clash in the form of the bitter dissentions and the subsequent disintegration of Joshua's family, Muthoni's conduct reveals the more profound problems of cultural transition. Significantly, Muthoni's notion of womanhood is predicated on a specific physio-cultural ritual, showing, as it does, the change of values as part of cultural change. This involves not only social but metaphysical and cosmological changes as well. Her death is emblematic of a social order showing signs of cracking under pressure from powerful external forces. Specific modifications in culture are useless unless the entire cultural context is altered to accommodate new infusions from the alien culture. From the point of view of the traditionalists, opposition to circumcision makes no sense. For this reason both Christian converts and Gikuyu traditionalists interpret Muthoni's death differently. In the view of the traditionalists her death is a vindication of the ancient prophecies that the faith would divide 'father and daughter, son and father,' while for Christians it confirms 'the barbarity of Gikuyu customs' (R.B. pp. 62-3). The failure of communal compassion on both sides and the use of Muthoni's death to justify their respective positions indicate the anxiety caused by the change of values. Adherence to either set of values at this point is an act of faith. Thus, Waiyaki feels Muthoni died on the altar of social disruption caused by the cultural clash. For this reason Muthoni has become a sacrificial lamb; her death, radicalizing both factions, plays an important part in the novel's handling of the reversal of values whose pivot is Waiyaki's messianic inheritance and role as educator.

Unlike Weep Not, Child, where the messianic vision is entirely restricted to Njoroge's fantasies, The River Between presents the prophetic tradition as a fact. Waiyaki's messianic inheritance is unambiguous, for he is a direct descendant of Mugo wa Kibiro, the secrets of whose prophecy had been revealed to him at an early age by his father. This prophecy then becomes a mission to him:

> Salvation shall come from the hills. From the blood that flows in me, I say from the same tree, a son shall rise. And his duty shall be to lead and save the people!
>
> Arise, Heed the prophecy. Go to the Mission place. Learn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices. Be true to your people and ancient rites' (R.B. p.24).

Overwhelmed by the inheritance of such a monumental task, Waiyaki's youthful mind entertains a fleeting impression that raises doubts about his father's sanity. Throughout the novel, however, the narrator and other characters reinforce the idea that Waiyaki is the promised 'messiah,' that in fact he has some extra-ordinary power. When the time comes Waiyaki is sent to the mission school; and no sooner has this been done than the effects of cultural change become apparent. Each time he returns home on vacation he seems increasingly uncomfortable with local customs and attitudes.

One important incident which gave Waiyaki's messianic vision impetus is the death of Muthoni. The controversy which surrounds her death leads the Siriana Mission School to expel all the pupils whose parents have resisted conversion to Christianity, among whom are Waiyaki's parents. This makes Waiyaki's expulsion unavoidable. Although he has not completed his high school education, Waiyaki starts his own school with the help of his former classmates. Soon his effective administration and success in persuading the people to invest their time and money in the education of their children, lead to a mushrooming of schools independent of missionary administration. At this point he really seems to be a messiah.

> They called him a saviour. His own father had talked of a messiah to come. Whom was the Messiah coming to save? From what? And where would he lead the people? Although Waiyaki did not stop to get clear answers to these questions, he increasingly saw himself as the one who would lead the tribe to the light. Education was the light of the country. That was what the people wanted. Education. Schools. Education (R.B. p.115).

Waiyaki's success puts him in the forefront of the political crisis, where he grew in the estimation of most people. When the Kiama (council of elders) is formed he becomes a member of it in spite of his youth. Impelled by the respect and trust which the people bestow on him, the proponents of the indigenous culture administer oaths in Waiyaki's name as a symbol of 'tribal' purity. This has the effect of turning him into a living legend. Being a solemn commitment, the oath was used to safeguard indigenous culture, ensuring that it was not contaminated by outside influences. The oath will be seen to be even more important later on in this chapter when we discuss the Mau Mau War, for then it was a declaration of allegiance to 'tribal' traditions and the liberation of the land which the Gikuyu people value so much. Waiyaki seems to embody in himself the solution to the problems of cultural change: 'He was a man who, impregnated with the magic of the white man, would infuse the tribe with wisdom and strength, giving it life' (R.B. p.104). By playing the role of mediator between Western culture and the indigenous culture and making the positive aspects of the former available to the latter, Waiyaki seems to have fulfilled the prophecy effectively. However, Like Munira in Petals of Blood and Njoroge in Weep Not, Child, his notion of education is both abstract and vague; moreover, tragically, he does not have a clear idea of where he is supposed to lead the people. Repeatedly, he contemplates these goals in relation to his own role and purpose, but his meditations are confined to vague and general questions. He never attempts to think in concrete terms in order to resolve specific problems. It is as though he has been paralyzed by the awesome nature of his mission. Waiyaki repeatedly tells himself that he should re-unite the 'tribe' which has been deeply divided by Muthoni's death into two sharply antagonistic camps. In fact the division had been apparent long before Muthoni's death, but its circumstances accentuated the conflict, exacerbating the animosity between the two ridges. Like his notions of education, Waiyaki's wish for the re-unification of the two ridges remains only a vague dream. His political naivety is demonstrated by his initial token participation in the Kiama and his eventual resignation from it because he wants to give his utmost attention to education. Unable to trace the trend of events, he is, as a result, unaware that his enemies are in control of the Kiama and are using his name to win the loyalty of the people. Later on, they turn this loyalty, obtained through the use of his name, against him, thereby paralyzing him.

Waiyaki's friends, particularly Kinuthia, repeatedly give him warnings and admonitions. By the end of the novel he comes to understand his cultural predicament, realizing as well that he has valued education too much to the neglect of the political needs of his people. He realizes painfully -- and too late -- that the people do not desire education for its own sake. For them education is a means of prosperity and political independence. Of prime importance to the people is the wish to regain the land which the European settlers have taken from them. All other causes are secondary to this issue. Anyone pursuing any other cause runs the risk of being rendered impotent, being found irrelevant to such a central issue. In a bid to change his tactics, Waiyaki subordinates education to unity, which he perceives as a means of achieving political freedom. In the process he comes to understand himself as a product of the reversal of values. He feels that there is more in the European traditions that could benefit Gikuyu culture, but he is equally aware that an attempt to simply replace the latter with the former would be both unworkable as well as dangerous, for it would contribute to the social disintegration of his people. Unless this new culture is sufficiently synthesized with and integrated into the cosmology of the old one, it will not meet the human needs of his people:

> It would not be a living experience, a source of life and vitality. It would only maim a man's soul, making him fanatically cling to whatever promised security, otherwise he would be lost (R.B. p.163).

Waiyaki sees Muthoni as a victim of this cultural clash, and that he, too, is in danger of becoming another one: 'His father too had tried to reconcile the two ways, not in himself, but through his son. Waiyaki was a product of that attempt.' (R.B. p.163). Like the River Honia which both unites and divides the antagonistic ridges, Waiyaki, in his attempt to unite the two ridges, becomes, unwittingly, a dividing force. By falling in love with Muthoni's uncircumcized sister, Nyambura, Waiyaki renders himself vulnerable to accusations of violating the oath of 'tribal' purity, thereby contaminating the tribal system of life. This gives the Kiama under the leadership of Kabonyi a rare opportunity to deal him a crushing blow. By refusing to renounce Nyambura, Waiyaki chooses a personal form of cultural synthesis. The traditionalists who have hitherto had considerable faith in him see him as consorting with their enemy, and consequently they dissociate themselves from him. This is indeed a vote of no confidence in Waiyaki for having broken what the 'tribe' regards as one of their most sacred traditions. In Gikuyu tradition a circumcized man is not only forbidden to marry an uncircumcized woman, but he is also forbidden to have any sexual relationship with such a woman. In flirting with an uncircumcized girl from the Christian camp, Waiyaki has come to be viewed as a betrayer of his people's trust. Consequently, he deserves to have that trust withdrawn from him. In this way he unwittingly renounces the very substance of his political aim, as well as his role as a potential messiah.

Waiyaki's final priority in putting personal before public obligations 'reveals a series of narrative problems and limitations which indicate that the novel itself is a product of the confusion caused by the peripeteia of values,'[3] as Abdul R. JanMohamed informs us. The circumstances of Gikuyu life were changing under the influence of European ideas. It is this change which Abdul R. JanMohamed calls a 'peripeteia of values.' In his view this change of ideas and culture is comparable to a sudden reversal of fortunes in a work of drama. If we take drama to be an imitation of real life then his use of the Aristotelian term 'peripeteia' becomes more meaningful.

It is quite clear that the narrator intends explicitly to present Waiyaki as a man who is constantly concerned with communal welfare: 'Waiyaki was made to serve the tribe, living day by day with no thoughts of self but always of others' (R.B. p.85). Yet the rhetoric of Waiyaki's contemplation and doubts demonstrates that he is not entirely a 'messiah', and that most, if not all, of his activities revert continually to questions about his status and leadership. His preoccupation with his role as leader and 'messiah' wraps him in a kind of narcissism that isolates him from the political desires of his people. Tension develops between the self and the community, which is in fact an integral part of his messsanic heritage. His father has told him that the prophecies of Mugo wa Kibiro and even of Chege himself had been scoffed at by the community; thus, Waiyaki's anticipation of rejection may further isolate him from the community as JanMohamed has explained:

> In any case, the divine source of his authority, by providing him with transcendent knowledge, cut him off from the Gikuyu to the extent that his vision of the future and his action based on it need not rely on a mundane

> familiarity with the people's social and political desires. Any time Waiyaki is at odds with the people he is able to use his faith in his role as a rationalization for his own decision. The isolation permitted by his position can be measured by the fact that he rarely consults anyone about his decisions regarding education. The conflict between the overt and covert intentions, between Waiyaki's narcissism and communal obligations, is accompanied by other problems in narrative intentions that reveal Ngugi's profound subconscious ambiguity about the nature of messianic calling.[4]

Ngugi seems undecided whether he should treat Waiyaki as a messiah or, in the words of JanMohamed, 'as a character whose prophetic calling is a self-delusion.'[5] The authorial ambivalence comes out clearly in the narrator's specific descriptions and indirect criticism of Waiyaki, as well as in the eventual portrayal of him as a scapegoat. Waiyaki's preoccupation with education is presented by the novelist as a product of colonial propaganda:

> He wanted to concentrate on education. Perhaps the teaching of Livingstone...that education was of value and his boys should not concern themselves with what the government was doing or politics, had found a place in Waiyaki's heart (R.B. p.76).

In the same breath Ngugi presents Waiyaki's concern with education as a part of his divine calling:

> The establishment of the Marioshoni school had been Waiyaki's idea and even now he could not understand fully how his idea had borne fruit so quickly. He saw it as something beyond himself, something ordained by fate (R.B. p.78).

In this manner the protagonist is portrayed as someone who is prone to human error as well as to divine surety. The author also takes an indirect critical view of Waiyaki's ignorance of politics by investing his colleague, Kinuthia, with a delicate understanding of the need to combine the long term importance of education with the immediate desire of the peasants to regain control of their lands through some form of political action. These criticisms do not help clarify the problem, implying, as they do, that Waiyaki is a mere mortal with an imperfect understanding of events. As JanMohamed informs us 'the narrator and other characters keep on insisting that he is a messiah, and Waiyaki too assumes the same posture: he never questions the fact that he is an ordained prophet.'[6]

The way the novel ends only increases the ambiguity. It is fairly clear that Waiyaki has been made a scapegoat by the people whose main concern is repossession of their land and preservation of their own way of life. This group neither heeds Waiyaki's plea for unity with the Christians nor can they condone his relationship with an uncircumcized woman. Ngugi seems to sympathize with Waiyaki's decision to choose a personal relationship over communal obligations on the one hand; but he also seems sympathetic to the people's decision to protect their own culture while at the same time sacrificing a promising individual. The final shift to a description of the River Honia, the rhythm of which reaches into the very hearts of the people, does not help resolve the author's ambiguity. Perhaps the shift to the River Honia implies that the process of regeneration started by Waiyaki is destined to continue. The reader is still not yet clear, however, whether Waiyaki is the messiah who, like Christ, has been turned into a scapegoat, nor does the reader have specific answers to the problems of peripeteia raised by the novel.

The River Between is a product of the same moods and circumstances that gave rise to Weep Not, Child. The significance of the messianic tradition is that it is based on leadership and salvation. It is important to note that both books trace the development of a child into adolescence, depicting the struggle of two central adolescent characters to come to terms with the ambiguities of the conflicts and anxieties of their societies which appear to be cracking in the process of being radically transformed by the new administration whose aim it is to spread Western ideas in its 'civilizing' mission.

Weep Not, Child takes further the conflict and confusion of values introduced in The River Between. In this novel we see that Ngotho's farm has been taken away from him after he has been conscripted into the support forces for the army, and that now he lives as a squatter on his former piece of land, which now belongs to a European settler-farmer, Mr. Howlands. The wresting of his land from him devastates Ngotho because he believes that land is a sacred gift from God to the Gikuyu people; the other reason for his demoralization is his failure to adjust to the modern cash economy. He suffers the indignity of being a servant on the land he considers his own. A master-servant relationship has been established, and Ngotho provides the needed cheap labour to Mr. Howlands. Howlands transforms the piece of land he has acquired from Ngotho into a commerical farm, growing cash crops on it. For him the piece of land is a symbol of personal conquest; for Ngotho, on the other hand, land is sacred. It is in this land that his ancestors lie buried; this piece of land is where his mother buried his placenta at the time of his birth. For Ngotho and the traditional society which he represents, land is a priceless asset whose ownership cannot be transferred, and least of all, to be converted into a cash commodity: 'Any man who had land was considered rich. If a man had plenty of money, many motor cars, but no land, he could never be counted as rich' (W.N.C. p.41). Land is invested with a spiritual value that transcended economic considerations and the modern laws governing ownership of property. Hence Ngotho patiently and carefully tends the farm on which he is squatting as if it were his own: "Ngotho felt responsible for whatever happened to this land. He owed it to the dead, the living and the unborn of his line, to keep guard over 'his' shamba" (W.N.C. p.55). Ngotho's lack of understanding of the basic contradiction between his notions of spiritual land tenure on the one hand, and the modern and alien system of land ownership on the other, both confuses and emasculates him.

As a result of this emasculation, Ngotho's family begins to disintegrate, thus reflecting, in microcosm, the general break-up of Gikuyu society. Boro, a Second World war veteran, returns to find that land is scarce and there are no jobs; he no longer respects his father's authority. His attitude signifies a refusal to accept the colonial status quo. He believes that their land was expropriated from them because of the cowardice and inaction of his father's generation. Boro, in rejecting his father's authority and joining the underground Mau Mau movement, whose sole aim is to liberate the land by force of arms, embodies the passing of the initiative from the older generation to the energetic youth. In a sense, it is a way of saying the older generation cannot adapt in a manner appropriate to coping with the new and powerful administration from Europe. Consequently, the onus falls on the easily adaptable youth. This probably explains why the tribe pins its hopes on the young Waiyaki in The River Between and Njoroge in Weep Not, Child. Another important theme which comes to play a significant role in Ngugi's narrative is education; it is another element which is crucial to both novels.

The decision to send Njoroge to school is a recognition of the change in values brought about by the arrival of the new culture from the West. The society comes to place a heavy emphasis on education. In this regard it is important to note that the wages of two of Njoroge's brothers go to pay for his education. When the time comes for Njoroge to go to high school, the investment ceases to be the exclusive liability of his family and becomes a public responsibility. The entire village feels duty-bound to invest in his education:

> Whatever their differences, interest in knowledge and book learning was the one meeting point between the people such as Boro, Jacobo and Ngotho. Somehow the Gikuyu people always saw deliverance as embodied in education. When time came for Njoroge to leave, many came near, many people contributed money so that he could go. He was no longer the son of Ngotho but the son of the land (W.N.C. p.148).

These acts of self-denial on the part of the villagers put pressure on Njoroge to excel in academic pursuits so as not to fail the people who had contributed so generously towards his education.

His will to succeed is also fuelled by the fervor of messianic prophecies which appear to be on the verge of fulfillment. Those who have been spiritually crushed, like Ngotho and his peers, frequently voice their hope and faith in deliverance from the situation by 'the Black Moses.' The 'Black Moses,' who incidentally is Jomo Kenyatta, stood for custom and tradition purified by the grace of learning and much travel. For the Gikuyu people knowledge is the key to the mysteries of Western culture which the older generation does not understand. With Kenyatta's arrest and apparent defeat, Ngotho turns his faith to his youngest son, Njoroge.

This transference of faith is never really expressed, but Njoroge succeeds in deciphering his father's hopes. The way in which Njoroge internalizes these influences, desires, hopes and fears reveals the conflicts and confusion caused by the change in values in a society in a state of transition and flux. He is a naive and solitary child whose understanding of the demands being made upon him reflects a rather abstract conception of education and of his own role in society. Like Waiyaki in the earlier novel, Njoroge:

> ...knew that for him education would be the fulfillment of a wider and more significant vision -- a vision that embraced the demand made on him, not only by his father, but also by his mother, his brother and even the village. He saw himself destined for something big, and this made his heart glow (W.N.C. pp.64-5).

Njoroge's naive understanding of education, makes him regard it, as did the protagonist of The River Between, as a panacea to the problems of his society - for him it 'held the very key to the future. He always thought that schooling was the very best that a boy could have. It was the end of all living' (W.N.C. p.63). As the political situation deteriorates, and his stepmother and brother are detained for violating the curfew regulations, Njoroge holds even more tenaciously to his vision of education. '...Njoroge was still sustained by his love for and belief in education and his role when the time came....Only education could make something out of the wreckage. He became more faithful to his studies' .pa (W.N.C. p.120). Njoroge loves education as an idea. Like

Waiyaki in The River Between, his goals are not well defined. All he knows is that he will use education to 'continue the work his father started' (W.N.C. p.120). As the political situation worsens Njoroge's mind turns more to escapist pleasure which derives from his messianic fantasies. His abstractions of education and messianic vision combine to promote what can only be called a narcissistic love. He responds to the economic pressures brought to bear on the Gikuyu, to their cultural humiliation, and to the confusion and anxiety of the days preceding the Mau Mau war by escaping into grandiose visions of himself as an educational leader, as well as a messiah destined to lead his people from bondage. His talk about waiting for a 'new day' attests to his idealistic or romantic view of the future.

Njoroge's vision of himself as a leader gradually shades into religious mysticism until he loses himself in 'speculations about his vital role in the country. He remembered David rescuing a whole country from the curse of Goliath. He feels 'awed to imagine that God may have chosen him to be the instrument of His Divine Service' (W.N.C. pp.134-5). Asked about his plans upon completion of his studies he can only reply that 'I have not thought out my plans' (W.N.C. p.148). From this answer we can conclude that, while Njoroge revels in messianic fantasies about his future role as leader of his people, he has not given serious thought to what that role will be. He is only impelled by an ancient prophecy. Like Waiyaki, Njoroge's messianic vision is as insubstantial as his love for education is real.

When the crucial test comes Njoroge's hollow and egocentric fantasies soon crumble. At the time of his father's death from torture and castration inflicted on him as a result of his acceptance of responsibility for a political murder he has not committed, and Njoroge's own subsequent torture, Njoroge's illusions and grandiose fantasies are shattered. Though innocent and in many respects naive, Njoroge, like his father, is tortured, and this confronts him with the bitter reality of a situation to which messianic visions are no solution: "For the first time Njoroge was face to face with the problem to which 'tomorrow' was no answer. It was this realization that made him feel weak and see the emergency in a new light" (W.N.C. p.167). It would appear that Njoroge is losing faith in the efficacy of education and the benign justice of a Christian God, on both of which tenets he has based his messianic fantasies. When his father dies, and brothers have either been imprisoned or killed, and Mwihaki refuses to escape with him to Uganda, Njoroge attempts suicide as a way out of the political quagmire in which he finds himself. Finally, with the conclusion of the novel, he admits to himself that he is a coward. It now strikes him, as it never did before, that suicide is too easy a way out of the problem. Worse still, suicide will not solve the political problems that bedevil his society.

The quick descent from the height of self-importance, messianic visions and hope for the future to an abyss of self-negation is enacted against the background of a society in violent turmoil. The different political views and conflict between generations and the graphic descriptions of torture and summary executions by both sides create a powerful microcosmic picture of a whole society being ripped apart by the scourge of war. The generation gap evidenced by the differences between Ngotho and some of his sons points to the mutual suspicion engendered by the violent conflict that has become the order of the day. The novel accurately depicts the trauma and ambiguities of a revolution.

Despite Njoroge's physical presence in this social upheaval, he remains a passive and reluctant witness of the events. His experience, in the words of Abdul R. JanMohamed, is that of a 'solitary adolescent who easily internalizes the hopes, frustrations and anguish of his society, and then soothes his own trauma with fantasies of self-aggrandizement.'[7] When everything crumbles around him, his only desire is to escape. First he took refuge in messianic dreams; when it dawned on him that these do not work, he attempted to run away to Uganda with Mwihaki. All else having failed, he attempts to commit suicide as a final way of escape. The rapidity of Njoroge's grandiose oscillations from one position to another can be accounted for only partly by the violence and trauma that surrounds him. The other aspect which accounts for these oscillations is the reversal of values that engulfs him; this element causes the confusion that is ultimately responsible for the fantasies that comprise the central experience of this novel.

The change in values starts with the attempt to negate, even destroy Gikuyu cultural values, and indeed the whole of the African cultural values followed by an understanding of the colonial situation and a justification of the rebellion. The whole impetus to abandon Gikuyu traditions is best characterized by the attitude of the European headmaster of the secondary school which Njoroge attends. He treats African students with due courtesy and respect but:

> he believes that the best, the really excellent could only come from the white man. He brought up his boys to copy and cherish the white man's civilization as the only hope of mankind and especially of the black races. He was automatically against all the black politicians who in any way made people to be discontented with the white man's rule and civilizing mission (W.N.C. pp.158-9).

A view such as this entails a rejection of traditional societal values, a simultaneous espousal of imperfectly understood Western values and an emasculation of the political will of indigenous people.

Njoroge exhibits the internalization of the changed values, even before he comes under the influence of this headmaster. For instance, he prefers the name Lucia to any Gikuyu female names, and he proudly associates with other Gikuyus who have abandoned indigenous values and have ardently but superficially imitated aspects of European culture. He also equates formal academic education, as well as the learning process in general, with the ability to speak and write English. While Ngotho considers land to be of prime importance, Njoroge who has never farmed, considers education in his abstraction of it, as the solution to all human problems. Even before he is exposed to formal programs designed to change his values, Njoroge has already abandoned his people's ethnic and rural traditions, beginning instead to subscribe to Western values which he does not fully understand. Similarly, he has no real interest in the intricacies of the political turmoil in the country, though his peers are deeply involved.

Exposure to various aspects of European values involves an intensive introduction to Christianity in the mission schools. Thus Njoroge, like other Africans, finds in the Bible parallels to the plight of his people and divine justification for their struggle:

> ...the Gikuyu people, whose land had been taken by the white men, were no other than the children of Israel about whom he read in the Bible...the black people had a special mission to the world because they were the chosen people of God. This explained his brothers remark that Jomo was the Black Moses (W.N.C. p.78).

While the Gikuyu people use similar analogies to justify their uprising against the settlers, Njoroge employs them as a balm to soothe the effects of the traumatic political situation on him:

> Njoroge came to place faith in the Bible and with the vision of an educated life in the future was blended a belief in the righteousness of God. Equity and justice were there in the world. If you did well and remained faithful to your God, the Kingdom of Heaven would be yours. A good man would get a reward from God; a bad man would harvest bad fruits (W.N.C. pp.77-8).

The Biblical parallels help fuel Njoroge's messianic fantasies. The abandonment of indigenous values and the attraction to and misunderstanding of foreign values leave him in a state of mental and physical limbo; he is grounded in neither culture. Just as he soothes his own anxieties with benign visions, so he feels he has a duty to comfort other people too. When he meets Mr. Howlands' son, Njoroge tries to calm his misgivings about the future of Kenya:

> 'Yes...so dark, but things will be alright.' Njoroge still believed in the future. Hope of a better day was the only comfort he could give a weeping child. He did not know that his faith in the future could be a form of escape from the reality of the present (W.N.C. p.154).

The novel is pervaded by a sense of ambivalence caused by the reversal of values. It is ironic for Njoroge to soothe Mr. Howland's son, who, though about the same age as the former, appears to have a better grasp of reality. Njoroge's understanding of issues is clearly seen to be imperfect in fundamental ways. What is not clear here is whether or not the author intended to use irony to further reveal the weaknesses of his main character. However, it is noteworthy that the narrator's tone is not one of irony, but rather that of sympathy with the character. Throughout the novel it is clear that Njoroge's visions are a form of escape. The narrator seems to be aware of this; yet he neither criticizes it, nor does he even explain its psychosocial origins. The confusion is further compounded by the lines from Walt Whitman's poem, 'On the Beach at Night,' which Ngugi uses as the epigraph to Weep Not, Child, and from which the novel derives its title:

> Weep Not, Child,
> Weep Not, my darling,
> With these kisses let me remove your tears,
> The ravening clouds shall not be long victorious,
> They shall not long possess the sky...

From these lines it is clear that the weeping child is Njoroge, whose life is shadowed by the 'ravening clouds' of settler occupation and political turmoil. But the coincidence between the narrator's attitude toward Njoroge as the 'weeping child' betrays the sympathetic nature of the narrator-protagonist relationship. While the narrator insists that Njoroge, having finally given up his messianic visions, has come to terms with reality, the actual portrayal of the hero does not support this insistence: such a contradiction is yet another manifestation of the novel's ambivalent effect.

By the end of the novel Njoroge has not yet undergone any significant change. He has not come to terms with the social and political reality of his country, nor has he totally abandoned his grandiose vision of himself. Taking all the guilt for the sufferings of his family, he accuses Mwihaki of betraying him by refusing to abscond with him to Uganda. By assuming all the guilt of his world and accusing Mwihaki of betraying him, he still follows the model of Christ, of a messiah who took responsibility for all human sins, was betrayed by Judas Iscariot and then made a scapegoat. Though changing his self-image from that of a saviour to that of a scapegoat, Njoroge still retains an egocentric attitude that is responsible for his isolation from reality.

Njoroge's fantasies are products of particular socio-religious factors in a specific colonial situation. They are products of the effects of land expropriation, of the emphasis put on education by the Gikuyus, of Christian and messianic influences, and of a fundamental reversal of values. The narrative ambiguity can be seen as a manifestation of the same forces. It exhibits, in the final analysis, Ngugi's inability to adequately define his stand toward these factors, which are part of his own socio-political background. Weep Not, Child can thus be seen as a product as well as a depiction of the confusion of values in a colonial situation. Its protagonist, Njoroge, in the words of D. Cook and M. Okenimkpe, is more 'a victim of circumstances...than an instigator of action.'[8]

The River Between deals with the struggle to free men's minds from the constraints of colonial domination in preparation for the assertion of national integrity and individual human identity. Weep Not, Child depicts Kenya during the period of the Mau Mau war, as Cook and Okenimkpe put it, 'stumbling towards group consciousness and group responsibility in spite of vicious counter-currents at a time of great confusion and uncertainty.'[9] A Grain of Wheat continues the story of Mau Mau warfare from where Weep Not, Child left off. It places the Mau Mau struggle in a detailed historical setting, delineating the relationship of this underground movement to the independence of Kenya. The novel narrates, in epic terms, the exploits of a military movement bent on ridding its territory of oppression through corporate action. This communal effort, however, is riddled with acts of betrayal which, in effect, are set-backs in the road to repossession of land. The book is, therefore, an extended and eloquent examination of heroism and treachery.

Betrayals by individual characters represent, in miniature, the wholesale betrayal of society by its power elite. When uhuru is achieved the leaders of the new state do not come from those who fought in the Mau Mau or even those who sympathized with the ideals of the Mau Mau. It is for this reason that Ngugi has written in a brief preface to A Grain of Wheat that:

> Although set in contemporary Kenya, all the characters in this book are fictitious. Names like that of Jomo Kenyatta and Waiyaki are unavoidably mentioned as part of the history and institutions of our country. But the situation and the problems are real --sometimes

> too painfully real for the peasants who fought the British yet who now see all that they fought for being put on one side (A.G.W. p.vi).

A Grain of Wheat is pervaded by an air of skepticism about the promise the uhuru held. Ngugi's romantic view of the 'Black Moses' in The River Between and Weep Not, Child is noticeably held under check in A Grain of Wheat. This novel forms a watershed in Ngugi's ideological development. As Ime Ikiddeh informs us in the foreward to Homecoming Ngugi wrote A Grain of Wheat after reading Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth and Robert Tressel's The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists:

> Thus Leeds provided an ideological framework for opinions that he already vaguely held. It was at this time too that we both read two books which became major influences: Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth, that classic analysis of the psychology of colonialism; and Robert Tressel's The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists, one of the most moving stories ever told of the plight of the working class in Britain...although Ngugi sympathizes with the Marxist idea of the 'workers of the world'...he sees the experience of the black man as being unique in the world...[10]

After independence Ngugi got disillusioned with the Kenyan leadership, and consequently drifted more and more towards Marxism which he sees as the only hope for his country. This is particularly so in his books of essays and his later works of fiction. Another passage by Ime Ikiddeh will serve to illustrate this point more clearly: "One cannot go very far in these essays without being assailed by well-known phrases like 'the ruling classes' and 'the exploited peasant masses and urban workers...."[11]

Ngugi's disillusionment with leadership and his sympathy with the common people, whom he increasingly calls 'peasants' or 'masses' is apparent in A Grain of Wheat. His perception of leadership and big business is that of 'thiefs' and 'robbers,' words he uses with sickening regularity in Devil on the Cross. Self-interest is seen by the novelist as an over-riding factor among the new leaders. To this end, the ordinary people do not get what they fought for: 'the situation' is 'too painfully real for the peasants who fought the British yet who now see all that they fought for being put on one side.' (A.G.W. p.vi). Gikonyo complains:

> But now, whom do we see in long cars and changing them daily as if motor cars were clothes? It is those who did not take part in the movement, the same who ran to the shelter of schools and universities and administration. At political meetings you hear them shout: Uhuru, Uhuru, we fought for. Fought where? (A.G.W. p.60).

The newly elected member of Parliament, who cheats the new land co-operative group, represents the emergent land-hungry class of politicians. These politicians use their newly acquired positions of trust to enrich themselves at public expense. They are the same breed of politicians as the member of Parliament for Ilmorog that we see in Petals of Blood, who even has the arrogance to refuse to listen to the grievances of his constituents, and M.A. Nanga, in Achebe's A Man of the People. As Achebe has eloquently put it, the trouble with this new breed of African politicians in the wake of African independence is that:

> A man who has just come from the rain and dried his body and put on dry clothes is more reluctant to go out again than another who has been indoors all the time. The trouble with our new nation...was that none of us had been indoors long enough to be able to say 'To hell with it.' We had all been in the rain together until yesterday. Then a handful of us - the smart and the lucky and hardly ever the best - had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers left, and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in.[12]

The whole concept of representation in the legislature is not only distorted, but it is also abused by the greedy politicians whose sole purpose for being in Parliament is personal aggrandisement as well as amassing wealth.

A Grain of Wheat, unlike its predecessors, does not have a single major character. It is a socio-political novel which dissects a society being ripped apart by the scourge of war. Here Ngugi has abandoned the use of messianic fantasies. Nobody takes refuge in the shell of such escapist visions. Everyone gets involved, for Ngugi, writing in Writers in Politics, has argued that it is simply not possible in such a context for anybody to assume a position of neutrality: 'What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral.'[13] This statement makes it impossible for anybody to claim neutrality or non-involvement in any situation; you are either on one side or the other. Even those who attempt to resist involvement are, like Mugo, drawn into the whirlpool of conflict very much against their will. Everybody, with the possible exception of Kihika, has been involved in one form of betrayal or another. By his stress on this generalized guilt Ngugi seems to be sounding a warning that anybody who fails the cause of society is guilty of betraying humanity.

A Grain of Wheat, as it opens, is set just a few days before Uhuru, and yet it takes a long look back at the events that led to the long awaited independence. It revisits the turmoil of the Emergency, juxtaposing it with the final outcome of the struggle for freedom. There are already those who, wary of the outcome of the struggle, describe the independence celebrations as being: 'like warm water in the mouth of a thirsty man.' (A.G.W. p.208). General R. comments that he knows that the war is not over: "'We get Uhuru today. Tomorrow we shall ask: where is the land? Where is the food? Where are the schools?'" (A.G.W. p.192).

In re-creating the events of the Mau Mau, Ngugi has written a novel that enables the reader to experience, in retrospect, the dynamics of a viable organic community. He has vividly created a social organization which ensures that each individual sees the others as complementary rather than antagonistic beings. The community under review, having been caught in a reversal of values, is now in the process of rejecting such values, attempting to find a new meaning for itself.

The actual time of action is about five days, but through flashbacks the reader experiences the whole Mau Mau movement and even the pre-revolutionary childhood of the protagonists as well as the mythic past of the Gikuyu. It is this mythic past which is, indeed, a unifying thread throughout The River Between, Weep Not, Child, and A Grain of Wheat.

The patterns of isolation and interaction in this novel are so entangled that a critical analysis inevitably violates their organic nature. Yet such a violation cannot be avoided if we are to understand the protagonists as individuals. As Micere Mugo has stated, 'Ngugi engages in a ruthless examination of individuals as well as the motives that activate them to stand at a distance from the swallowing crowd and make a personal stand.'[14] Most characters in the novel are in one way or another trying to run away from an aspect of their private lives that they find too painful to face. Mugo, for instance, tries to lead the life of a hermit, but he ultimately realizes that he cannot run away from society or from his own true self. He has tried to keep away from the 'madding crowds,' as Thomas Hardy would put it, but he has come to realize the futility of it all. Consequently, he must face the crowd which mistakenly idolizes him for heroic deeds they imagine him to have carried out. He has come to acknowledge that human beings in a society are like the fingers of a hand; they rub against each other, and if one of them brings oil it soils the others. The people's belief that Mugo has made a contribution to the struggle seems to be given credibility by his act of coming to the assistance of Kihika's pregnant widow who is being manhandled by the police. This appears to be his way of making amends for his betrayal of Kihika. Ngugi first brought out the idea of a hermit who wants to lead his life withdrawn from society in The Black Hermit. Unfortunately for Mugo, Ngugi does not easily allow escapist isolation. The novelist sees such isolation as a refusal to participate in the affairs of society. Finally, Mugo is persuaded to appear at the independence celebrations in order to deliver a keynote speech. His revelation of his betrayal of Kihika is a stern warning by the novelist that, even as Thabai rejoices, it may very well be crowning traitors posing as nationalist leaders. As the revelry goes on, Ngugi seems to be saying, the new nation should examine itself and take stock of what happened prior to the end of the war. Almost all the characters in the novel, except Kihika, have been involved in a betrayal of one type or another. The author uses this series of betrayals to chastise the community which inhabits the world of his novel. Mugo's confession of his treachery is used to reconcile the conflict between Gikonyo and Mumbi, which is, itself, caused by Mumbi's betrayal of her husband. In this sense betrayal reconciles betrayal. While accusing Mumbi of infidelity, Gikonyo is painfully aware that he himself is not free from treachery. His confession of the oath in detention was in fact a worse crime, for he had sold out the cause of the whole society. In that realization there is a common understanding of human frailty. Gikonyo recognizes Mugo's confession as a deed of heroism, believing that:

> He was a brave man...He stood before much honour, praises were heaped on him. He would have become a chief. Tell me another person who would have exposed his soul for all the eyes to peck at (A.G.W. p.265).

Such a confession brings Gikonyo to his senses so that he may face a painful reality he was trying to avoid. His wife has had a child by another man, Karanja, and this is a fact that he has to address himself to. Like Mugo, he has to be brave to face the truth rather than try to evade it:

> Remember that few people in that meeting are fit to lift a stone against that man. Not unless I -- we -- too -- in turn open our hearts naked for the world to look at (A.G.W. p.265).

With this realization in mind Gikonyo, ready to confess his own guilt, lifts the barrier that blocked the path of reconciliation between himself and Mumbi, whom he has not touched since his return from detention. Gikonyo both judges and treats Mumbi harshly partly because he can no longer live with himself. He has lacked the perseverance and courage to endure the hardships of life in detention, consequently he confessed to taking the oath.

During the Mau Mau war, which A Grain of Wheat treats in considerable detail, those who took part in the fighting had to take an oath of secrecy. The oath was a declaration of allegiance to the cause for which the Mau Mau guerillas stood. Its primary purpose 'was to bind' its 'adherents to their cause,'[15] as George Padmore has indicated. Nobody who had taken this oath was supposed to confess to having taken it, even if they were captured and tortured. To confess to having taken the oath was an act of treason; it was regarded as selling out the cause to which one was committed. This was a way of guarding against disclosure of information about the strategies of those who fought in the forests. Betrayal of this trust could be punished by death. Such threats were intended to ensure the unity and unreserved commitment of the fighting forces. The Reverend John Samuel Mbiti has aptly explained the mystery behind such oaths, in general, in the following terms:

> The belief behind oaths in general is that God or some other power higher than the individual man, will punish the person who breaks the requirements of the oath or covenant. Like curses, oaths are feared and many are administered ritually and at great expense.[16]

Having betrayed this trust, Gikonyo is plagued by a sense of guilt. The sound of footsteps which haunts him is a manifestation of a troubled conscience. At one stage Gikonyo kicks Mumbi's child and calls Mumbi a prostitute. For some time he refuses to talk to her, share her bed, or even eat her food. Only after Mugo's courageous confession does he muster enough courage to admit his own guilt and forgive his wife for her guilt. He realizes that, like Mugo, he too must open his heart to Mumbi. To this end, therefore, Kihika's death becomes, if only indirectly, instrumental in the reconciliation of Gikonyo and Mumbi. In this light Kihika becomes 'a grain of wheat' which must die in order to be productive, giving birth to 'a new relationship,'[17] in the words of David Cook. The process of regeneration, started by the reconciliation between Mumbi and Gikonyo, becomes a metaphor for the regeneration of the entire society ripped apart by the violence of war. Mumbi, who bears the name of the Gikuyu legendary mother, is fittingly used as a symbol of the potential rebirth of society. It is she (whose name means 'moulder' or 'creator,'[18] as Micere Mugo informs us) who will re-create the Gikuyu society from the ruins of war. In a way, then, Kihika can be seen as something of a messianic figure whose death sets in motion the process of rebirth of a new society from the ashes of war. Here Ngugi points effectively 'to a future pregnant with possibilities,'[19] in the words of Micere Mugo.

Revelation of his involvement in the murder of Kihika takes off the hood or veil which has hitherto concealed Mugo's role as a traitor to the fighting guerrillas, as well as to the general populace who support the cause of the fighters in the forests. One of the major aspects of the novel is the question of the concealed self. Very many characters' roles and acts of betrayal are hidden until the very end of the novel: 'As well as finding their roles in the changing society, characters have also to discover and come to terms with the tragedy of betrayal and self-betrayal that events have forced on them,'[20] as Clifford Robson contends. Arthur Ravenscroft has eloquently articulated this point in the following terms:

> A Grain of Wheat is an advance in Ngugi's development as a novelist, and this appears in the confident orchestration of the four different but interrelated betrayals and their consequent corrosion of selfhood...the four characters who had each been involved in the events that led to Uhuru are now slaves to their memories of their own personal inadequacies.[21]

The theme of betrayal is significantly present in the two earlier novels, but in A Grain of Wheat Ngugi makes it a dominant concern. When Karanja confesses to having taken the oath he is made a colonial chief and goes around in a hood to pick out those involved in Mau Mau activities. While he does this, Karanja is plagued by a sense of guilt. He is aware of 'many angry eyes watching him in the dark' (A.G.W. p.6). These two incidents convey a general atmosphere of suspicion and of many troubled consciences. Not only are people being watched, they watch themselves too. The atmosphere is sultry with mistrust. In the heat of the war and of countless betrayals nobody is certain of anybody else's identity or of their allegiance; 'the extent of self-scrutiny reveals that people cannot even trust themselves,'[22] as Clifford B. Robson puts it. The gradual unfolding of events, reaching its climax in Mugo's revelation of his betrayal of Kihika, adds to this general uncertainty.

Karanja, having betrayed his people by confessing to having taken the oath, then comes to spy on them from behind his hood, the purpose being to conceal his identity. It is not only Karanja whose identity is veiled by wearing a hood. There are many characters in the novel who have been involved in various forms of betrayal, who yet look good in the eyes of the public because their guilt is concealed from the public eye. They are, in a sense, wearing a veil of silence about their misdeeds. So, while Karanja's veil is physical, theirs is psychological. Consequently, they are falsely venerated. Their public image contrasts sharply with their roles as betrayers, as in the case of Mugo. The plot of the novel is so stylized that something dramatic has to happen to remove the veil that covers their true identity. The revelation of the truth, in most cases, leaves the public, who have all along invested a good deal of trust in the betrayers, breathless with disbelief.

Githua is one of the characters whose role and identity are mistaken; consequently he enjoys a false veneration from the public. For a long time he has been regarded as one of the first 'victims' of the emergency, a pitiable character whose shirt collar gleamed with dirt and whose leg had been amputated. In the words of Robson, his 'drunken voice and ruined body flaunt the suffering of those involved in the struggle.'[23] Rather than earning him scorn, his braggart poise wins him sympathy and he is listened to with interest:

> Remember us, Chief. Remember us. Do you see these tatters? Do you see these lice crawling on my shoulders? I was not always like that (A.G.W. p.144).

Githua's image as a symbol of suffering remains in place as long as possible until General R. comes along to tell Mugo the truth about him. From General R. we learn that Githua never supplied bullets to the men in the forest, and that he lost his leg when the lorry he was driving overturned. Githua appears fairly infrequently in the novel, but he serves to underscore the problem of knowing who people are and is a good example of the way in which characters, deluding themselves, use public occasions to mask their personal deficiencies. We further learn from General R. that Githua 'invents a meaning for his life...Don't we all do that?' (A.G.W. p.172).

A Grain of Wheat has been described by Robson as a 'sequel to The River Between and Weep Not, Child.'[24] Many of the elements of the two earlier books have been interwoven into the more complex structure of A Grain of Wheat. The full context of the social and political turbulence which culminates in the Mau Mau uprisings cuts across the three novels. Ngugi begins with Gikuyuland prior to the advent of colonial rule, noting, as Gerald Moore has put it, 'its essential harmony and unity when seen from above, its apparent division and hostility when viewed from below.'[25] The novelist is consistently preoccupied with understanding the nature of the forces which have shaped modern day Kenya. In the events of the emergency which forms the bulk of the plot of Week Not, Child the novelist exposes the ever present problem of man's inhumanity to man.[26]

Education in The River Between is, according to Ezekiel Mphahlele, 'a Trojan horse,'[27] which has produced the present state of Kenya. The education which the Gikuyu loved so much has produced a power elite to whom the reins of power were handed over at independence, thereby perpetuating the exploitative structure against which the peasants had fought. Many of those who received that education had never really had the interests of the masses at heart; instead, they indulge in messianic fantasies in which they see themselves as the ordained leaders of their people. But, as C.B. Robson puts it, Ngugi remains optimistic in his 'belief that change for the better is possible...a persistent feature of all of Ngugi's novels. His writing is a continued search to realize the promise suggested by the sacred grove of The River Between.'[28]

Certain themes such as the repossession of the land, cultural conflict and class antagonisms are dominant concerns of Ngugi's writings. They indicate the novelist's commitment to the value of the role of the writer in society. Believing it to be an abdication of responsibility for the creative artist to ignore the burning issues of society, Ngugi has directly and unequivocally dedicated his artistic career to a dissection and examination of the social, political, cultural and economic ills that bedevil the Gikuyu society, and indeed, the African societies as a whole. Another constant feature of Ngugi's writings is his portrayal of strong female characters, whom the novelist sees as the most oppressed section of society.

> Because the women are the most exploited and oppressed section of the entire working class, I would create a picture of a strong determined woman with the will to resist and struggle against the conditions of her present being.[29]

Ngugi's concern with women's issues is one of his dominant themes, and forms a significant aspect of his work. The novelist consistently depicts women as custodians of society, as well as symbols of the regeneration and continuity of society. The next chapter will therefore, explore in considerable detail the role of women in Ngugi's novels.

CHAPTER IV

THE FEMININE PRINCIPLE IN NGUGI'S NOVELS

Throughout his writings Ngugi wa Thiong'o displays considerable faith in women. Only very rarely do his female characters die, even when there is war. They have an insight and wisdom that will guide their children, the remnants of society, to a reconstruction of a new society from the ashes of the old. Their firmness and wisdom are symbolic of a regeneration of society, a society which will not be 'quickened, except it die,'[1] and from whose ruins shall emerge 'a new-earth,'[2] in the words of David Cook. As Woman puts it in The Trial of Dedan Kimathi:

> 'Kimathi was never alone...will never be alone...as long as Women continue to bear children...One day, the soil will be restored to the people. Our land shall one day be truly ours.'[3]

Sigrid Peike has said, 'The future lies in the women.'[4] The onus for the continuation and survival of society is upon the women of that society, which invests an emancipatory interest in them. There exists a close association between women and the land, as Jomo Kenyatta has indicated:

> The Gikuyu consider the earth as the 'mother' of the tribe, for the reason that the mother bears her burden for about eight or nine months while the child is in her womb, and for a short period of suckling. But it is the soil that feeds the child through a lifetime; and again after death it is the soil that nurses the spirits of the dead for eternity.

> Thus the earth is the most sacred thing above all that dwell in or on it. Among the Gikuyu the soil is especially honoured, and an everlasting oath is to swear by the earth.[5]

Since the earth is the 'mother' of the tribe, her children have a sacred duty to defend her. To ensure continuity mother earth should be, not only defended, but also immortalized. As man tills the soil and grows crops 'mother' earth guarantees the survival of the human species. In a way, this is like a long period of suckling.

The reverential respect that the Gikuyu have for their women has its roots in their creation myth. The legend about the origin of the Gikuyu has it that Mumbi and Gikuyu were the first people in history. They had only daughters, nine of them, and these became the mothers of the tribe -- hence the Gikuyu saying that mother is supreme. One of Ngugi's mother figures in A Grain of Wheat is Mumbi, who also symbolizes the regeneration of society, as we shall show later in the present chapter. This supremacy of the mother in Gikuyu society has given female characters a special place in Ngugi's writings.

Significantly, Waiyaki in The River Between appeals for the unity of the clan, when he realizes that he is deeply in trouble, by invoking the name of Mumbi, the legendary mother of the tribe: 'We are all children of Mumbi and we must fight together in one political movement....Can a house divided against itself stand?' (R.B. p.171). The Gikuyu stop short of tearing Kabonyi apart at the mention of Mumbi's name because of the awe in which they hold their legendary mother; for she occupies a special place in their hearts.

The strength and foresight with which Ngugi's female characters are invested enable them to act as towers of strength to their male counterparts, often guiding them from illusion to reality. For instance, Muthoni in The River Between has great daring in deciding what she felt was the right thing, regardless of her father's opposition to her position. Her arguments in favour of circumcision are very strong, almost too strong for a child of her age. Boldly, she tries to combine the conflicting ways of life by accepting circumcision while at the same time remaining a faithful Christian: 'Waiyaki, tell Nyambura. I see Jesus. And I am a woman beautiful in the tribe...' (R.B. p.61). The two cultures have created a crisis for Muthoni. In this indigenous culture a girl must be initiated into womanhood, for it is during the initiation rites that important secrets of the tribe are passed on to the youth. These rituals have a tremdendous educational significance, for it is during such ceremonies that sex education is transmitted to the youth of the tribe. The ceremonies are performed when the boys and girls reach puberty; the elders of the tribe take this opportunity to explain the physiological changes taking place in the youth at that stage in their development. But unfortunately for Muthoni, her father's religion forbids participation in such rituals as it considers them 'savage' and 'pagan' practices. Realizing the magnitude of the problem, Muthoni decides to rebel against her father in order to undergo the ritual to which her father is so fervently opposed. She does not think that the two ways of life are mutually exclusive. To buttress her argument she cites her father and mother who have undergone the circumcision rites, and yet are Christians. Christianity alone does not satisfy her needs: 'The white man's God does not quite satisfy. I need something more....Or how does a girl grow into a woman?' (R.B. p.30). Crucial to Muthoni's peace of mind is the unification of both ways of life. Although this process costs her her life, in a way, Muthoni's death is a fulfillment of her desire. She has both studied the Bible and undergone circumcision before she dies. The two cultures find a perfect union in death, away from the rivalries of the world. Sealing this union, Muthoni sends Waiyaki to tell Nyambura that she 'sees Jesus' and that she is 'a woman, beautiful in the tribe.'

While Muthoni is outright and forceful, her sister, Nyambura, displays more tact. She does not strain her relations with her father, and yet she is still able to get her own way. By presenting Nyambura in this way, it seems that Ngugi advocates restraint against 'reckless" extremism. To this end, therefore, her love relationship with Waiyaki can be seen as a compromise between the excesses of Muthoni, Joshua and Kabonyi since Waiyaki, rejecting conservatism, advocates a new form of liberalism.

The relationship beetween Waiyaki and Nyambura in The River Between encompasses all the major conflicts in the society to which they belong. Both lovers, like their community as a whole, grapple with conflicting internal forces. The two of them feel impelled to continue both in the ways of their fathers and in the direction of the new ways, contrary to their parents' beliefs. Within the indigenous community, the conflict is evident in the opposition between the ridges of Kameno and Makuyu. The division has been brought into sharper focus by the introduction to Makuyu of Christianity and of Western values, while Kameno has remained loyal to indigenous traditions. The conflict threatens to destroy the traditional community. Waiyaki's father and Nyambura's father represent opposite sides in the conflict, and the loyalty and obedience of the two children to their parents has placed them in conflicting factions. Yet the children are drawn to reconciling their opposed orientations because of their love for each other.

It is important to understand the internal dynamics of Nyambura in order to appreciate her relationship with Waiyaki. She is the embodiment of the conflicts inherent in the community. Initially, she is content to follow her father in his strict, almost fanatical adherence to religion and family obedience. Gradually, she loses faith in her father's rigid way of life. Her first sense of conflict comes as she sees her sister attempt to unify the tribal and religious desires within her by undergoing circumcision. Beginning to feel torn by her sister's action when confronted with breaking the news to her father, she 'experienced the torture of a soul torn between two loyalties with fear in front' (R.B. p.40). Although she is afraid of her father, feeling that Muthoni has done wrong in disobeying him, her first doubts are nonetheless apparent. Like Muthoni, who decided to make a separate peace by attempting to merge the two cultures within her, ending up by consummating that union in death, Nyambura attempts a similar union by eventually drawing closer to Waiyaki. At this point it is in order to recall the 'bare grain,' in the epigraph of A Grain of Wheat, which must die in order to produce fruit. In this sense, then, Muthoni's death sowed the seeds of regeneration. Waiyaki's non-partisanship and love reveals to Nyambura the cruelty and rigid destructiveness of her father's insensitivity to Muthoni's death which pushes Nyambura into the loving arms of Waiyaki. Joshua destroys his own family with his fanatical devotion to a religion he does not fully understand. Summarizing this view Nyambura has this to say:

> If it came to stand between a father and his daughter so that her death did not move him, then it was inhuman. She wanted the other... that held together...that united (R.B. p.155).

Thus in Waiyaki, Nyambura sees a possible resolution of her almost unbearable conflict concerning obedience to her father and his religion. Waiyaki 'is the only man who can save her from misery' (R.B. p.122).

Unlike Joshua who gets swept wholesale into the new religion, his wife, Miriamu, has her reservations which she withholds from him. Not an argumentative woman, she puts up with Joshua's irrationality. She is a peaceful woman who does not like tension in her house. We are told that her faith and belief in God are coupled with her fear of Joshua. Despite considerable harassment from her husband, she keeps calm, making it clear that hers is a religion learnt and accepted: 'inside, the true Gikuyu woman was sleeping' (R.B. p.39). Moved by motherly love, she weeps at Muthoni's death; for her, no faith takes precedence over her love for her daughter. Her grief is aggravated by Joshua's impassive and insensitive face at Muthoni's death. She is convinced that Joshua has no feelings and does not even care about the loss of his daughter. For Joshua an alien religion has taken precedence over all kinship bonds.

Mwihaki in Weep Not, Child is very much like Nyambura in that it is in juxtaposition with her that we see Njoroge; as Eddah Gachukia says, she is 'the yardstick by which we measure him and by which he measures himself.'[6] While Njoroge is something of a visionary, she emerges as the stronger, more practical and realistic figure. Claiming him to be her '*njuka*', which, according to the Gikuyu-English Dictionary (ed. T.G. Benson), means a 'new-comer,'[7] she takes Njoroge to school and looks after him as a mother would a son. Njoroge, the 'new-comer' into her life, gives Mwihaki the warmth and self-assurance she cannot find in others, including her own family. Exuding considerable self-confidence, Mwihaki attracts the reader with her daring and forthrightness. After her mother had rebuked Njoroge and others for their conduct at prayer, Mwihaki is quick to soothe his hurt feelings. She asks Njoroge to wait for her after school so that they can go home together, thereby causing his late arrival, incurring his mother's disapproval. Mwihaki displays a remarkable sense of frankness; when Njoroge protests that he would like to go home, she disarmingly retorts: 'Why do you keep alone -- to avoid me? (W.N.C. p.39); when he answers defensively that it is because she comes out late, she responds by saying: 'No, I don't come out late. It's you. You try to avoid me' (W.N.C. p.40). These sharp remonstrations embarrass Njoroge, who has no option but to wait for her, though he will get home late, much to his mother's displeasure. When later on their relationship is jeopardised by Ngotho's rash attack on Jocobo, Njoroge manages to avoid Mwihaki for some years, but she comes to seek him out, touching his heart with her characteristic frankness: "I am lonely here....Everyone avoids me' (W.N.C. p.99). Mwihaki fully realizes the corrosive effect of her father's position, as a colonial chief, on her own personal relationships with people -- even girls of her age -- who would otherwise be friendly towards her. Feeling lonely and isolated, Mwihaki comes out to seek Njoroge, who apparently is the only one who can give her the fellowship she needs. Here again, as in The River Between, we see two youths attempting to forge a union of their own in defiance of their feuding families. The theme is a recurrent feature of these earlier novels; it appears to be Ngugi's intention to use male-female relationshps to illustrate how unity may be forged in a society torn apart by intra-factional rivalries. Revolted by the thought that her father may have taken part in some of the killings which have become the order of the day, Mwihaki's musing on the situation reveals her insight and maturity: 'One man sins, God punishes all...and the sin could be committed by anyone, you or I...' (W.N.C. p.107).

When all is lost, his dreams of education shattered and his family disintegrated, Njoroge suggests to Mwihaki that they should run away to Uganda; whereupon she displays equanimity and wisdom in her response: 'Don't you see that what you suggest is too easy a way out? We are no longer children....Let's wait for a new day' (W.N.C. p.154). Njoroge's escapist tendencies come up from time to time when he attempts suicide towards the end of the novel and when he indulges his messianic tendencies. However, Mwihaki's love for him does not blind her to reality; she is a wise voice of counsel to him.

Eddah Gachukia argues that education, in this society is seen 'as a symbol of deliverance, of salvation for the whole family.'[8] Nyokabi, having realized this importance of education, impresses upon Ngotho the need to have one of their sons educated:

> If Njoroge could now get all the white man's learning, would Ngotho even work for Howlands and especially as the wife was reputed a hard woman? Again, would they as a family continue living as Ahoi in another man's land, a man who clearly resented their stay? (W.N.C. p.19).

Once again we see Nyokabi tackling Ngotho over the strike issue, drawing his attention to the consequences and possibility of failure of the strike action. Her caution displays a realistic approach to the impending turmoil: 'What [sic] black people to us when we starve?' (W.N.C. p.60). There are various ways of reading Njokabi's response, but whatever attitude the reader takes one thing is clear: Nyokabi is not fascinated by 'reckless' nationalism that endangers the lives of the families of those involved. Some readers may dismiss her position simply as unpatriotic. For her, the needs of her immediate family must be catered for first, and only then can Ngotho start thinking about his 'reckless' nationalism. Having spoken openly about her position, she gets into trouble with Ngotho, from whom she gets a beating for her realism. The advice Nyokabi gives to Ngotho in persuading him to send Njoroge to school actually anticipates Juliana's outburst after Ngotho's attack in Jacobo:

> I have always told him to take them away from the land. I have always said that such Ahoi are dangerous. But a man will never heed the voice of a woman until it is too late. I told him not to go. But he would not listen (W.N.C. p.63).

The relationship between Gikonyo and Mumbi in A Grain of Wheat helps bring out the effects of a situation where a friend cannot be distinguished from a traitor. While he is in jail, we see how the thought of Mumbi imbues Gikonyo's mind with the will and resolution to live so that some day he may be re-united with her. Upon his release he is so frustrated to find Mumbi with another man's child that his first impulse is instant rejection of the 'prostitute' and her little 'bastard.' Haunted by visions of Mumbi responding passionately to Karanja's seductive power, he sees his wife's conduct as an act of betrayal. However, in the heat of Gikonyo's 'madness' his mother's attitude towards their matrimonial crisis calls for a critical re-assessment of his response to an unfortunate situation. Wangari, Gikonyo's mother, warns her son: 'But you are a man, now. Read your heart, and know yourself' (A.G.W. p.102). While realizing the full import of her 'adulterous' conduct, Mumbi keeps her poise, continuing to tender good advice to her husband when appropriate. This woman, who seemed the model of perfection has soiled her good image with a single incident in her life. However, viewed from another angle, Mumbi is presented by the novelist as a voice of pity for the universal weakness of mankind. Without malice, she hastens to send Karanja a warning note as soon as she learns that his life is in danger. It is she again who urges Mugo, the betrayer of her brother, Kihika, to forget the past, and look to the future. Completely devoid of malice and vindictiveness, Mumbi is ready at all times to forgive others for their human frailties. The plea she makes to Mugo is a passionate appeal to bury the hatchet, and plan for the future: 'Speak about the living' (A.G.W. p.209), she urges. In this context, therefore, Mumbi should be seen in the light of the positive redemptive role women play in Ngugi's novels. Eddah Gachukia, writing in Busara in an article entitled 'The Role of Women in Ngugi's Novels,' makes the point 'that the insight and wisdom of women are important factors in creating a better country.' Perhaps it is Mumbi's magnanimity that has prompted Sigrid Peike to group Mumbi of A Grain of Wheat and Wanja of Petals of Blood into one 'category and connect them both with the legendary Mumbi.'[10] According to Ulla Schild's review of Sigrid Peike's thesis, Mumbi and Wanja are grouped together and connected to the legendary Mumbi, the mother of the tribe because of their beauty. According to the review Peike sees the beauty of these two women as a reincarnation of 'Mumbi the heroine.'[11]

Generally, the relationships between Ngugi's male and female characters are one-sided. While the female characters are seen mostly as magnanimous, and sympathetic, the men are depicted mostly as fickle villains who exploit their relationships with their female counterparts for their own selfish ends. This is particularly so in Ngugi's later works. In A Grain of Wheat, for instance, Kihika values his wife, Wambuku, not for what she is, but for her role in relation to himself. Despite her infidelity, Mumbi is a forceful woman; when she speaks her voice makes an instant impact. After speaking to Mugo, the latter had to admit that 'Mumbi's voice was like a knife which had butchered and laid naked his heart to himself' (A.G.W. p.152).

Gikonyo strikes the reader as an example of simple, frail humanity. Ngugi's handling of the Gikonyo-Mumbi relationship shows that his treatment of the love theme has matured since the adolescent days of The River Between and Weep Not, Child. Certainly, Gikonyo and Mumbi are older than their counterparts in the earlier novels, and the difference in the levels of maturity is reflected in their conduct. Their love is described in 'terms of sensations, inner feelings and jealousies,' as Eustace Palmer argues. 'They seek to communicate their feelings towards each other in terms of motifs and symbols.'[12] Two passages in particular describe Gikonyo's romantic love for Mumbi in realistic terms; his skill at playing a guitar, for instance, is turned into an expression of that love:

> But he found his hands were shaking. He strummed the strings a little, trying to steady himself. Mumbi waited for him to play the tune. As his confidence rose, Gikonyo felt Thabai come under his thumb. Mumbi's voice sent a shudder down his back. His fingers and heart were full. So he groped, slowly, surely in the dark, toward Mumbi. He struck, he appealed, he knew his heart fed power to his fingers. He felt light, almost gay (A.G.W. p.91).

On another occasion, when Mumbi brings to Gikonyo a panga which needs a wooden handle, he takes the opportunity to carve it as an expression of his love for her:

> The touch of wood always made him want to create something. But now he felt as if his life depended on giving himself wholly to the present job. His hands were firm. He drove the plane (he had recently bought it) against the rough surface, peeling off rolls of shavings. Gikonyo saw Mumbi's gait, her very gestures, in the feel and movement of the plane. Her voice was in the air as he bent down and traced the shape of the panga on the wood. Her breath gave him power (A.G.W. p.94).

It is impressive to watch the skill and devotion of Gikonyo striving after perfection, for only through perfection can he adequately express his love for Mumbi. Experiencing 'a holy calm,' as Eustace Palmer puts it, which is 'in love with the earth'[13] as a result of his carvings, we see love and art merge to become an 'enobling and purifying'[14] force in the novel.

Mumbi, though a simple character, is presented as one of the best people in the village. Unlike the others, she does not seem to be tortured by inner conflict, but, unfortunately, a collocation of circumstances combines to put her in an awkward position where she finds herself unsure of her husband's love. Though very eager to discuss with Gikonyo her infidelity, her task is made all the more difficult by the latter's refusal to discuss her child. By refusing to discuss the child Gikonyo causes Mumbi a great deal of mental anguish. She knows she has wronged her husband, though unwittingly, and she will be the first to admit it. Unfortunately, Gikonyo's refusal to discuss the child deprives her of the opportunity to explain what happened. On the other hand, Gikonyo's conduct is irrational, if understandable, for he must decide one way or the other: his only choices are either to end his marriage with Mumbi or to acknowledge the baby and discuss it with her if they are to continue to live together. The child is a living reality which has come to stay; to try to wish it away is both immature and impractical.

Mumbi's infidelity, which most critics regard as adultery, is in fact, as Derek Elders points out, 'seduction.'[15] Having resisted relentless pressure from Karanja, who acquired considerable power during the Emergency, Mumbi's resistance was bound to wane sooner or later. In addition, Karanja had helped her and her mother-in-law during difficult times. Upon hearing from Karanja that her husband would soon be released from detention, she becomes overwhelmed by excitement and surrenders herself to

Karanja. Unfortunately, a pregnancy results and this puts undue strain on her relationship with her husband. On her way home, after visiting her husband in hospital, Mumbi is caught by rain, and, like Mugo after his confession, she surrenders herself to it. Making no attempt to take shelter from the rain, Mumbi is completely drenched by the time she reaches home. This is significant in that it is her way of doing penance. Knowing that her husband's response is irrational, she nevertheless acknowledges her infidelity has seriously wounded his pride. This form of penance recalls Mukami's solitary walk in the stormy night to the 'sacred tree' in Secret Lives. Though she wants to stop visiting Gikonyo in hospital, her mother prevails upon her and she continues her visits. When next she visits him she notices that he is now eager to discuss the child. It would seem that Gikonyo, too has done some kind of penance, and has come to realize the irrationality of his conduct; consequently, he is now ready to acknowledge the child and is even prepared to discuss the matter. Both Mumbi and Gikonyo have gone through harrowing experiences; what has happened between them cannot be glossed over lightly. Both need to open their hearts to each other, and re-plan their future in the light of changed circumstances.

There is a sense in which the relaxation of hostilities between Gikonyo and Mumbi resembles the reconciliation between John Thompson and Margery Thompson on the eve of their departure for Britain. This easing of tension reassures Margery in the same way as the renewal of their relationship reassures Mumbi. Although Margery knows that on arrival in Britain they will have to start all over again, she is at least certain that the worst is over. It is Margery, not John, who, in an embarrassing moment during their farewell party, saves the situation by taking the initiative to go and hold her husband's hand. By the same token, it is Mumbi who, at the end of the novel, points the way to a positive resolution. After all the betrayals and injustices in the heat of the turmoil, life must continue. To this effect, Mumbi, a strong mother figure, declares:

> 'I must go now. I'm sure the fire is ready at home. Perhaps we should not worry too much about the meeting...or...about Mugo. We have got to live.'
> 'Yes, we have the village to build,' Warui agreed. 'And the market tomorrow, and the fields to dig and cultivate ready for the next season,' observed Wambui, her eyes trying to see beyhond the drizzle and the mist.
> 'And children to look after,' finished Mumbi as she stood up and took her rainsack ready to leave. Then suddenly she turned round and looked at the two old people, as at aged wisdom which could tell youth the secrets of life and happiness (A.G.W p.275).

The regeneration of the whole Gikuyu culture is implicit in the symbolic references by Gikonyo and Mumbi to the mythic ancestors of their society, Gikuyu and Mumbi. The slight variation between the names of Gikonyo and Gikuyu is mitigated when the reader takes into account Jomo Kenyatta's explanation that "in correct Gikuyu phonetics 'Gikuyu' should be pronounced 'Gekoyo.'"[16] This view derives more strength from Gikonyo's musings while in detention that his 'reunion with Mumbi would see the birth of a new Kenya' (A.G.W. p. 121). When Gikonyo finally decides to open his heart to Mumbi, he is in fact setting in motion a whole process of regeneration. The title of the final chapter of the novel, 'Harambee,' gives further weight to this contention, implying, as it does, a coming together of a communal effort. The desire for communal cohesion and regeneration is finally symblized in the stool which Gikonyo plans to carve for Mumbi:

> He would now carve a thin man, with hard lines on the face, shoulders and head bent, supporting the weight. His right hand would stretch to link with that of a woman, also with hard lines on the face. The third figure would be that of a child on whose head or shoulders the other two hands of the man and the woman would meet. Into what image would he work the beads on the seat? A field needing clearance and cultivation? A *jembe*? A bean flower? (A.G.W. p.279).

As their relationship mellows Gikonyo alters the image of the woman on the stool leg: 'I shall carve a woman big, big with child' (A.G.W. p.281). The stool thus symbolizes the rebirth of Kenya. However, this is a renaissance born of the need for communal effort for clearance and cultivation. This, then, is the final vision of the symbolism that is subordinated to the realism used in the portrayal of the community. Both Mugo and Kihika are, therefore, 'grains of wheat' which have been sacrificed so that the wheat may grow again, with

Gikonyo and Mumbi, and by implication the Gikuyu community as a whole, as the beneficiaries of such sacrifices. The fact that Mumbi has come to symbolize regeneration of society lends credibility to Sigrid Peike's argument linking her to the legendary Mumbi, the beneficent mother of the tribe. Whether or not Wanja in Petals of Blood can be described in similar terms only on account of her beauty would require a leap of the imagination, as Ulla Schild would put it.

Beaten and rejected by her husband on account of 'cold thighs,' Wangari, Gikonyo's mother, decides that 'there is no home with a boy-child where the head of a he-goat shall not be cooked' (A.G.W. p.85); taking her baby, Gikonyo, she boards the train to Thabai. There she sends him to school where he learns sufficient skills in carpentry to enable him to make a living. Coming home in tears after surrendering herself to Karanja, it is not to the condemnation and scolding of a mother-in-law that Mumbi comes, but to Wangari's comfort and understanding. Wangari's motherly and homely realism, as she calls to all the 'earth' to witness a son's 'abuse' of his mother, wins her the admiration of the reader:

> 'Come all the earth and hear a son, my son answer me. Does[sic] not concern me who brought you forth from these thighs? That the day should come -- hah! -- touch her again if you call yourself a man!' (A.G.W. p.201).

The usually gentle and homely Wangari has worked herself into an untouchable fury. When the need arises Wangari is capable of rising to the occasion. Consequently, Gikonyo is unlikely to 'touch' Mumbi again. When Wangari says to Gikonyo: 'Read your own heart, and know yourself' (A.G.W. p.201) she is in fact, though unwittingly, addressing that message to all the characters in the novel, and indeed to those of us who are often quick to point an accusing finger at the flaws and sins of others, little realizing that we too have our own deficiencies, that we are, in fact, part of the same frail humanity. Hers is a call for a general sense of introspection, a kind of soul searching that is necessary for an objective understanding of others, tempered, as it is, by an understanding that the observer, too, is but a frail human being.

The story of Wambui, the woman who carried secrets from the forests to the villages and back from the villages and towns to the forests, in A Grain of Wheat, during the Emergency, serves to underscore the role that women can play in a revolution. Wambui knows the underground movements in the Rift Valley. Rather than emphasizing the humor of going about with a gun tied to her groin as Eddah Gachukia does, the reader should view this woman as an accomplished strategist who knew how to circumvent a network of police and homeguards. Her outburst to the Gikuyu policeman who starts searching her all over, echoes Wangari's outburst to Gikonyo quoted earlier, and has a universal significance worthy of extended attention:

> 'The children of these days...Have you lost all shame? Just because the white man tells

> you so, you would actually touch your mother's...the woman who gave you birth? All right, I'll lift the clothes and you can have a look at your mother...and see what it'll bring you for the rest of your life.' She actually made as if to lift her clothes and expose her nakedness. The man involuntarily turned his eyes away (A.G.W. p.24).

In this society this kind of talk would amount to a curse; knowing it only too well, the Gikuyu policeman is unlikely to touch the woman again. Knowing their limited physical strength, women use their wit and common sense for self-defence. Contrary to G.C.M. Mutiso's view, women, at least in Ngugi's writings are not all that helpless.[17] Okot p'Bitek supports this contention, observing in his book Africa's Cultural Revolution, 'that women are endowed with skill, not duplicity; that they are not false even when they lie.'[18]

Karanja's mother, Wairimu, has suffered through the loss of her children; the only survivor was Karanja himself. She had high hopes for him, but Karanja exhibited attributes which did not presage a great son. His mother complains about and even threatens to break or burn his guitar. In a way Karanja exhibits qualities similar to Unoka's, Okonkwo's father, in Achebe's Things Fall Apart. He is a light-hearted, merry-go-lucky kind of fellow. Significantly, figures like this are seldom successful in traditional society; that is why the ambitious and industrious Okonkwo came to hate his improvident father, and it is in this sense that Karanja's mother is gravely concerned about her son.

After scolding Karanja, when the anger has subsided, Wairimu would gently and soothingly tell her son a story to illustrate the fate of every idle person. Long after her death, it is the thought of this story that, reminding Karanja of his mother, gives him a feeling of nostalgia. During the Emergency she disapproves of Karanja's co-operation with the white man in becoming a homeguard and later a colonial chief. Expressing her disapproval of, and bitterness at, her son's betrayal of his people, she warns him:

> 'Don't go against the people. A man who ignores the voice of his people comes to no good end' (A.G.W p.256).

Ashamed of her son, but acknowledging their kinship bond, Wairimu conveys the bitterness mixed with her dilemma when she says: 'a child from your womb is never thrown away' (A.G.W. p.256).

In The Trial of Dedan Kimathi the Woman plays a symbolic role. As the Girl and Boy sit at her feet 'she represents all the working mothers talking to their children.'[19] Initiating the youth into the political struggle, she educates the grown-ups in the demands of the guerrilla war. She undertakes to feed the fighters in the forests, at her own personal risk. Like Wambui in A Grain of Wheat, she is not even afraid to take up a gun to face the enemy. In her confrontation with Johnnie, the half-interested trooper is both stunned and overwhelmed by her determination and resolve.

In Petals of Blood the two women whose resolution and ingenuity impress the reader are Wanja and her grandmother, Nyakinyua. As a young school girl Wanja is seduced by a married man who cunningly promises her a good life but laughingly abandons her when he learns of her pregnancy. Faced with the ignominy of having an illegitimate child, she throws her baby into a toilet after birth. Her sense of guilt for having killed her baby manifests itself in the form of the memory of the child which returns to haunt her. In her attempts to atone for the murder she undergoes mental anguish, wishing to have another baby who will be let to live. In her bid to realize her wish she asks Munira to 'break the moon on' her, but unfortunately their relationship proves sterile. The failure of their relationship to bear fruit points to Munira's failure to interact and set the pace in matters of social discourse.

As a barmaid, Wanja's 'salary is not regulated,' as G.D. Killam points out, 'but paid according to the whim of the employer. She is a member of the most ruthlessly exploited category of women in Kenya.'[20] She comes to Ilmorog to find peace in a return to the soil of her ancestors. With Munira she seeks to fulfil a prophecy of the local sage, Mugo wa Mwathi, who upon consultation had said that Wanja could conceive a child during the time of the new moon. She therefore asks Munira to 'break the moon on' her. The failure of their union increases the couple's sense of alienation. For Wanja, Munira is only the instrument through which she may fulfil the prophecy, but the 'joylessness of his life, his inability to become involved with people is characterized by his sexual impotency,'[21] in the words of G.D. Killam.

Wanja and Abdulla enter into a partnership to brew and sell Theng'eta. This brew derives its name from the Theng'eta plant which, growing wild on the plains, symbolizes luxuriance, vitality and vigor. The plant is also associated 'with Ilmorog's pristine traditional splendor,'[22] as Eustace Palmer indicates. Theng'eta makes a very potent drink which only the old can drink:

> Theng'eta is the plant that only the old will talk about. Why? It is simple. It is only they who will have heard of it or know of it....It was when they were drinking Theng'eta that the poets and singers composed their words for a season of Gichandi, and the seer voiced this prophecy. (P.B. p.204).

Theng'eta was the drink that Nyakinyua, that embodiment of traditional values, and her husband brewed, and it is significant, as Eustace Palmer contends, that it was stronger and much more potent than the 'impure adulterated variety now mass-produced by the greedy capitalists in their sophisticated distilleries.'[23] The beverage also symbolizes truth and purity, for the red Theng'eta flower was used to 'purify' it; this purified liquor had the power to force people to face the truth about themselves. In a revealing passage in the novel Nyakinyua has this to say of Theng'eta.

> 'This can only poison your heads and intestines. Squeeze Theng'eta into it and you will get your spirit....It gives you sight, and for those favoured by God it can make them cross the river of time and walk with their ancestors. It has given seers their tongues; poets and Gichandi players their words; and it has made barren women mothers of many children. Only you must take it with faith and purity in your hearts' (P.B. p.210).

Converting this traditional symbol of fecundity and luxuriance into what most critics, including Eustace Palmer, see as a 'debased modern spirit by capitalists suggests the erosion of those values and the destruction of traditional innocence by the corrupt and depraved agents of modernism.'[24]

Having lost her business partnership with Abdulla to the big businesses from the city, Wanja resolves not to allow herself to be exploited any more. She builds herself a brothel, becoming madame to a group of girls whom she hires out to the rich business men who want to satisfy their sexual passions. G.D. Killam has further argued that Ngugi has given Wanja 'a stature larger than life.'[25] Wanja is certainly imbued with an inexhaustible energy in her zest for life. Surmounting ordeals which others around her do not survive, she controls her destiny in a way that others cannot do. She has been, in the words of G.D. Killam, 'a barmaid, madame, victim and victor.'[26] Her movement from one social level to another places her in a unique position, making her in many creative ways the embodiment of Kenyan womanhood. It is probably this mercurial quality in her that enables her to move with apparent ease from one social level to another that has prompted Sigrid Peike to discern in her a somewhat supernatural quality; making her equate Wanja and Mumbi in A Grain of Wheat with Mumbi, the legendary mother of the tribe.

Wanja enters into her career as a 'whore-mistress' without any feeling of guilt, adjusting quickly to the new law of the land. She tells us that her'heart is tearless' about what she has committed herself to. 'You know I tried' (P.B. p.311). Realizing that times have changed she moves swiftly to be in tune with the changed circumstances. To this end, she tells us in a rather embittered statement:

> Kimeria, who made his fortune as a Home Guard transporting bodies of Mau Mau killed by the British, was still prospering...Kimeria, who had ruined my life and later humiliated me by making me sleep with him on our journey to the city...This same Kimeria was one of those who would benefit from the new economic progress of Ilmorog. Why? Why? I asked myself. Why? Why? Had he not sinned as much as me? That is how one night I fully realized this law. Eat or you are eaten. I have had to be hard...It is the only way...Look at Abdulla...reduced to a fruit seller...oranges...sheepskins...No, I will never return to the herd of victims...' (P.B. pp.293-4).

When Wanja says, 'Eat or you are eaten,' she is in fact talking about the new commercial ethos which has gripped Ilmorog, together with the attendant social climbing and the cut-throat competition that has become the norm in Ilmorog.

The close association between women and land is everywhere evident in Petals of Blood. The rains that come after the ritual visit to the city, during the course of which Wanja becomes once more a victim of Kimeria's sexual lust, are a purification and a consecration of the people's parched souls. The journey, in this regard, becomes a spiritual quest for redemption; it is a necessary sacrifice which must be taken before deliverance comes. The humiliation that Wanja suffers at the hands of Kimeria, that rabid social climber, is a necessary sacrifice, for when the whole clan is endangered an individual must be sacrificed so that the community may be redeemed, for no individual is greater than society. In this sense Wanja is both victim and redeemer. Only after that journey into the spiritual wilderness of the city do the rains come, and people go back to their normal pastimes of story telling and myth making.

> The older folk told stories of how Rain, Sun and Wind went a-wooing Earth, Sister of Moon, and it was Rain who carried the day,and that was why Earth grew a swollen belly after being touched by Rain. Others said, no, the raindrops were really the sperms of God and that even human beings sprang from the womb o mother earth soon after the original passionate downpour, torrential waters of the beginning (P.B. p.196).

Normalcy restored, people can now go on with their everyday chores. The rains have brought with them a spirit of rebirth which is counterpoised with the 'erstwhile arid souls of individuals,'[27] as Eustace Palmer has argued. Ngugi once again takes the opportunity to use water as a powerful symbol of regeneration and purification, as with Mugo and Mumbi in A Grain of Wheat, and Mukami in 'Mugumo' in Secret Lives and Other Stories, Wanja walks in the rain:

> Wanja was possessed of the rain-spirit. She walked through it, clothes drenched, skirt-hem tight against her thighs, revelling in the waters from heaven (P.B. p.196).

Walking in the rain, in Ngugi's novels, always bodes well for society. It symbolizes a troubled conscience that stands in dire need of purification, as in the case of the drop of water that hangs precariously over Mugo at the beginning of A Grain of Wheat. This drop of water is of course a figment of Mugo's imagination, appearing to him in the form of a dream; it is a false creation of a heat oppressed brain. However, it reveals Mugo's troubled conscience. The water symbolism assumes mythic proportions, considering that most of the characters who walk in the rain in Ngugi's novels are women. It is the women, those supreme mothers of the tribe, who must do penance, so that the entire society may be cleansed. Walking in the rain, therefore, is a form of penance which purifies the soul.

The death of Nyakinyua, Wanja's powerful grandmother, occurs at the time it does to herald the passing away of the old ways. When the homestead of the traditional sage, Mugo wa Mwathi, is razed flat by bulldozers, the shrine of traditional life is destroyed; the act signifies to Nyakinyua and her peers that their time has passed. Significantly, Nyakinyua and Muthoni in The River Between are the only female characters who die in the novels of Ngugi. By their very ritualistic nature, their deaths enhance the already considerable stature of women in Ngugi's writings. Their deaths, particularly that of Nyakinyua because of her age, become a ritual passage of an era in their societies, heralding the death of the old ways. These are 'grains of wheat' which must die to start a process of regeneration.

Like Mumbi in A Grain of Wheat and Wanja in Petals of Blood, Wariinga in Devil on the Cross represents that regeneration. Like Wanja, she changes radically in the course of the action of the novel, but in each phase of her life she is an honest and straightforward girl who, through no fault of her own, falls prey to the villainous machinations of men. Getting involved with a married man at an early age, like Wanja, she gets pregnant, ruining her chances of pursuing her educational program. Looking for work after her pregnancy, Wariinga becomes bitterly disillusioned to realize that she cannot obtain a job without sacrificing her integrity. Those in positions of influence are scorned for abusing their positions of trust, thereby holding deserving candidates at ransom for motives other than required by official protocol. As Cook and Okenimkpe contend, 'Wariinga was the chosen prey of Boss Kihara as much as she was of her ruthless landlord.' [28]

The rather melodramatic ending of Devil on the Cross is, as Cook and Okenimkpe put it, "as symbolic as the 'great' competition between the capitalist thieves."[29] It is a metaphor for the role that Ngugi sees for the gun in the ultimate 'conflict between classes,'[30] as Cook and Okenimkpe have argued. In this conflict of intersts, Wariinga, unlike her counterparts in the earlier novels, is prepared to act rather than recoil into an escapist cocoon. Shooting down the Rich Old Man who had deflowered her and destroyed her prospects for further education, Wariinga has chosen to act alone instead of submitting to exploitation. This seems to hint at the role that Ngugi sees for women in the 'conflict between classes.' In choosing to act alone Wariinga has exacted retribution for the evil that the Rich Old Man epitomizes. So injustice was avenged, not by the people's collective will, but by one lonely woman who loved it. The use to which Wariinga puts the gun is very much similar to that to which Eunice puts it in Achebe's A Man of the People. After chief Koko's thugs had run Max over with their jeep, Eunice took a pistol from her hand-bag and pumped two rounds of bullets into Chief Koko's chest. The endings of the two novels, Devil on the Cross, and A Man of the People are similar in many respects.

Women are potent symbols of continuity in the writings of Ngugi, thereby epitomising a regenerative power. Women as the custodians of the tribe's continuity have the future on their side. The increasing stress on this aspect in his later writings brings to a climax Ngugi's concerns with women's issues; thereby putting him in the mainstream of feminist writing. He consistently portrays women as the guardians of society, and nowhere is this point made clearer than in The Trial of Dedan Kimathi when Woman argues that:

> 'Kimathi was never alone...will never be alone...as long as women continue to bear children....One day, the soil will be restored to the people. Our land shall one day be truly ours (T.D.K. p.21).[31]

In another telling passage in his prison diary, Detained: The Writer's Prison Diary, Ngugi has said of women:

> Because the women are the most exploited and oppressed section of the entire working class, I would create a picture of a strong determined woman with the will to resist and struggle against the conditions of her present being....Isn't Kenyan history replete with this type of woman? ...Wariinga will be the fictional reflection of this resistance heroine of Kenyan history (D.W.P.D. pp. 10-11).[32]

It is this emancipatory, as well as regenerative role for which Ngugi spares his female characters. As long as women continue to bear children there will be men enough to liberate and defend the land, in such a manner the continuity of the clan is ensured. For this reason most of the female characters in Ngugi's novels, like Wariinga in Devil on-The Cross, march out triumphantly at the end of the novels to 'meet their fate,' as Cook and Okenimkpe contend, 'immune for the moment by their innocence and purity of purpose, from the furies around them.'[33]

In his later novels, Ngugi is self-consciously didactic, providing a new education for women. In this sense his recent writings reflect much contemporary thought, feminist and non-feminist alike, in realizing a feminist experience that is rich, strong, vibrant and self-assured. He is thus positively in the mainstream of modern writing.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Very little critical attention has been paid to the theme of land in the writings of Ngugi. Hardly a full-length essay exists to date on this important subject. Moreover, whatever has been written on this theme has been scattered over numerous essays dealing primarily with other vital topics worthy of critical scrutiny in Ngugi's work. The paucity of critical material on this topic constitutes a serious critical omission considering the significance of land in Ngugi's writings as well as in the entirety of the Gikuyu social fabric.

Future literary criticism on the writings of Ngugi will do well to pay a good deal more attention to this aspect than it has hitherto enjoyed. The cultural conflict and political confrontations that run across Ngugi's writings have, as their basic cause, the expropriation of land. Yet, the tendency among essayists is to underplay this aspect, and only make a cursory mention of it.

The theme of land is not always manifest in Ngugi's writings. This is probably the reason why G.D. Killam has said that the land theme in The River Between is 'a little more than a leitmotif.'[1] Most of the problems that we see in Ngugi's writings have been caused by dispossessing the Gikuyu of their land by the Europeans; in this regard, what we see --

and that which has attracted considerable critical attention -- is only 'the tip of the iceberg.' Writing about The Old Man and the Sea. Ernest Hemingway has told us of the significance of the underwater part of the iceberg:

> First I have tried to eliminate everything unnecessary to conveying experience....Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn't show....But the knowledge is what makes the underwater part of the iceberg.[2]

Although it does not always surface, the question of land is, indeed, ever present in Ngugi's works. Like the nine tenths of Ernest Hemingway's iceberg, it is no less real than the more manifest themes which have enjoyed far more prominent critical scrutiny. Knowledge of the basic underlying cause of the cultural conflicts and political turmoil in Ngugi's works is what makes Ernest Hemingway's iceberg theory relevant here.

The society under review invests land with religious associations. Land, for the Gikuyu, is not only a means of livelihood, it also 'unites the living members of the tribe' as well as providing an enduring link between the living, 'the dead and the unborn posterity,'[3] as Jomo Kenyatta informs us. Perhaps even more revealing is Mugo Gatheru's attitude toward the place of his daughter's birth, West Hampstead, England:

> I felt sad to leave the birthplace of my daughter. In fact, I still feel sentimental about it because it was there that the placenta of my daughter was disposed of as soon as she was born; if she had been born in

> Kikuyu Country, the placenta would have been buried near our gate by the old woman who acted as midwife. At the hospital I was told it had been burned.[4]

The burial of the placenta at birth, like the cutting of the genital organ at circumcision and the subsequent dripping of blood, unites the individual mystically with his or her ancestors and with the will of Ngai, for in the words of Jomo Kenyatta, 'it is in the ancestral lands that the ancestors lie buried.' Jomo Kenyatta further informs us that it is through 'incarnation that the future generation is linked with the past, thus bringing spiritually the three groups, i.e. dead, living and unborn, into one organic whole.'[5] It is this organic link between the dead, the living and the unborn that is uppermost in the Gikuyu mind; it is a sacred bond, always lurking in the background to Ngugi's works. The notion of the spiritual ties between the three groups bursts forth occasionally when Ngugi wants to make a significant point about his people. In a further telling passage in My People of Kikuyu, Jomo Kenyatta has said that:

> The Kikuyu have a saying which means: 'There can be no ground for friendship with one who seeks to deprive you of your land, your women and your cattle.' For they hold that without these three a nation is dead. The earth is the mother whose breast gives suck to the children of the nation. She supplies both men and women with material comforts of life, and thus enables them to bear many children, and during their infancy they receive the nourishment of Mother Earth through the breast of a woman; and when this natural food fails in the woman, there is the cow to fill the need.[6]

According to Jomo Kenyatta, the buying and selling of Gikuyu land is all done symbolically in the form of a wedding ceremony, because the Gikuyu do not think that it is proper reverence to sell 'the mother of the people,' or any part of her, in a straight cash transaction. Deprived of his piece of earth, his _shamba_, the Gikuyu man suffers 'a spiritual loss,' as Ngotho puts it in _Weep Not, Child_. For land has a sense of mystery about it; it possesses a spiritual and mystical value to those who eke a living from it. In Gikuyu tradition land is the single most valuable thing that they inherited from their creator. Land, therefore, becomes an integral part of ancestral worship, hence Ngotho's rhetorical questions: 'When a man was severed from the land of his ancestors where would he sacrifice to the creator? How could he come into contact with the founders of the tribe, Gikuyu and Mumbi?' (_W.N.C._ p.110).

One of the most potent weapons in the bitter fight to recapture Kenya's lost motherland was education. It is significant that critical opinion on the role of education in Ngugi's fiction varies. There are some critics who view education as a powerful weapon that was used in the struggle to reclaim the land; on the other hand, there are those critics, led by Ezekiel Mphahlele, who view education as a 'Trojan horse'[7] which enabled Europeans to make inroads into traditional society, thereby undermining its unity and cohesion. It is noteworthy that the kind of education that was offered -- and that which most of the characters in Nguge's fiction received -- was primarily missionary education; accordingly, education and religion went hand-in-hand in this context. The two became twin weapons in the deculturation of the 'tribal' African, creating a new being of him, something which Mugo Gatheru aptly designated 'a child of two worlds' in his book, A Child of Two Worlds. This education had the effect of alienating its recipients; the tragic result for the Western-educated individual was a loss of touch with the mainstream of traditional African society. Indulgence in messianic fantasies became a common form of escape for such people. Finding themselves without any solid base from which to operate in either culture, they hanker after old prophecies about the emergence of a son from the hills to lead his people to the promised freedom. This has the result of creating weak characters, who, rather than helping to promote change in the cause of events, become victims of circumstances, passively accepting the status quo. In spite of this effect of education on its recipients, for the Gikuyu knowledge of the enemy's magic 'became the sole objective. Ignorance was the declared enemy of the Gikuyu, and education was the weapon,'[8] as Karari Njama puts it. This is particularly apparent in the way the general public enthusiastically responds to Njoroge's departure for further education:

> When the time for Njoroge to leave came many came near, many people contributed money, so that he could go. He was no longer the son of Ngotho, but the son of the land (W.N.C. p.148)

To this end, therefore, education has the same effect as the oath of unity, the placenta burial in the birth ritual and initiation. Of the Gikuyu who journeyed far to acquire education with the single purpose of reclaiming the land, Jomo Kenyatta was the chief.

The Gikuyu see the story of their tribe in a somewhat similar light to that of the Jews in the Old Testament. When the colonial administration imprisoned Kenyatta, as we have seen in Weep Not, Child, the Gikuyu people saw this as persecution of their leader, indeed, as persecution of their messiah. Jomo Kenyatta had, by this time, assumed mythic dimensions in keeping with Mugo wa Kibiro's prophecy. His imprisonment therefore became the trial and persecution of a Gikuyu political as well as spiritual leader. It appears that the Gikuyu political system was a theocracy -- a system in which political and religious leadership are blended together; James Olney has declared that those in power 'tried him as the Jews tried Jesus and only came short of crucifying him.'[9] Kenyatta's detention, trial and subsequent imprisonment became the last straw that broke the camel's back in Weep Not, Child. The historical events chronicled in this novel made the Gikuyu even more resolute in their belief that, indeed, Jomo was their promised saviour through whom their providential destiny would be realized:

> There was a man from God whose name was Jomo. He was the Black Moses empowered by God to tell the white Pharoah, 'Let my people go.' (W.N.C. p.88).

Parallels between Jomo Kenyatta and Jesus Christ abound in Ngugi's earlier fiction, particularly in A Grain of Wheat. It is probably for this reason that Ngugi has written in Homecoming, his first book of essays, that: 'One could say that if Christ had lived in Kenya in 1952, or South Africa or Rhodesia today, he would have been crucified as a Mau Mau terrorist, or a communist.'[10] Ngugi's later fiction reveals disaffection with Jomo Kenyatta and his administration. In these later works the novelist has completely abandoned the idolization of the 'Black Moses' of The River Between and Weep Not, Child; instead he has taken a satirical whip and flagellated the object of his former reverence. Writing in his prison diary, Ngugi has said of Jomo Kenyatta and his administration:

> But by 1966, the comprador bourgeois, led by Kenyatta, Mboya and others, had triumphed. This faction, using the inherited colonial state machinery, ousted the patriotic elements from the party leadership, silencing those who remained and hounding others to death.[11]

In another scathing attack on the Kenyatta administration Ngugi has written:

> In Africa, the comprador-led KANU government took a less and less pro-Africa position, culminating in that shameful act of allowing Kenyan territory to be used by Israeli Zionist commandos to strike against Uganda and in its tacit support for the Muzorewa-Smith regime in Zimbabwe.[12]

The image of Ngugi that has emerged from this study is one of a commentator on those aspects of society that he sees as negative. Deploying all the resources at his disposal, Ngugi furthers the views and policies he advocates. Taken in totality, his fictional and polemical works reinforce this view. Commitment to the transformation of their societies has dominated, though in different ways and to varying degrees, the thinking and writings of Ngugi and Achebe. Their works are, in fact, an espousal of a philosophy of life that they would like to see take root in their societies. Writing in his book of essays, Morning Yet on Creation Day, Achebe had this to say: 'Here, then, is an adequate revolution to espouse -- to help my society regain its belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-denigration.'[13] If Ngugi's pronouncements have perhaps been less profound and certainly less quoted than those of Achebe, his fiction is no less than an espousal of an 'adequate revolution' which he envisions for his society. As indicated earlier in this study, Ngugi's thinking has turned more and more Marxist. One cannot go far before one is assailed by well known words such as 'peasants,' 'masses,' and 'proletariat,' particularly in his essays and later works.

In keeping with the numerous statements he has made, some of which have been quoted in the introductory chapter to this study, Ngugi has related his art to the social issues of the day, so that, according to Cook and Okenimkpe, 'it closely mirrors the changes that have taken place in his reformatory and political thinking.'[14] While many critics have assertively argued that Ngugi's art has been choked by his political commitment, Cook and Okenimkpe have strongly argued to the contrary:

> While the facts of the writer's upbringing and personal experiences form the staple of his subject matter, literary values are not questioned. It is part of the universal heritage of literature that it should seek to highlight the problems which burden, manacle and maim mankind. For the youthful Ngugi these problems included, at one level, family afflictions such as childlessness, marital strife and kindred feuds;and at another level, communal adversities such as droughts or floods, and the vast societal dilemmas of colonialism, confrontation between religions, creeds and patterns of behaviour, and Mau Mau. Resolution is sought in terms of man's enduring spiritual values.[15]

Ngugi's achievement in his first three novels lies in being 'able to absorb historical events into the framework of the narrative and yet still create fiction,'[16] according to Robson. The novelist's work shows that in a dynamic social situation human beings are, in the words of Robson, usually 'caught up in a complex pattern of events to which they react in unpredictable, irrational ways; they suffer and cause suffering.'[17] The novelist in Weep Not, Child and A Grain of Wheat looks closely at the Emergency to show how those involved acted out of personal as well as political motives. The clash between the ridges in The River Between is seen in a way that brings out their different moral standpoints. Ngugi consistently refuses to sentimentalize the protagonist of this novel. Both strengths and weaknesses are delicately balanced so as to avoid oversimplification of the 'hero.' In The River Between the novelist moves forward chronologically, starting with the serene and 'undisturbed ridges and ending with the opening up of Gikuyuland,'[18] as C.B. Robson contends. Although The River Between is mainly chronological, it has many pressures built into it. These increase proportionally as the situation develops in order to underscore the underlying tensions.

In Weep Not, Child the novelist uses time shifts to juxtapose events: examples include Boro's killing of Mr. Howlands and the news of Ngotho's rash conduct. In this novel events move more rapidly than in The River Between. This quickened pace of events is suggested by the tensions and trauma caused by the Emergency together with Njoroge's child-view' of the world. In the words of C.B. Robson, the interlocking of viewpoints in A Grain of Wheat gives a sense 'of psychological and moral density.'[19] Moving with more versatility between various time dimensions, Ngugi achieves, in the process, more complexity and compactness of form in A Grain of Wheat.

The movement of the three novels, seen as a whole, is mainly linear. In The River Between, it is the struggle within the family, the Waiyaki-Nyambura affair, education, and religious and political rivalry. Weep Not, Child treats the subject of growth and development: Njoroge grows up surrounded by the role of his father, the activities of the Mau Mau and colonialists. A Grain of Wheat traces the inevitable movement towards Independence: this movement is occasionally interrupted, however, to allow the novelist to explore the state of mind of the various characters.

In his social commentary, Ngugi has come to see his earlier works as being too reticent about the nature of social problems in his society. Aiming at correcting this imbalance, the novelist came to write A Grain of Wheat in which he awards blame across the board. A watershed in the author's development, A Grain of Wheat marks a departure from the mildness of the social commentary and emphasis on messianic visions realized in the first two novels, elements which the novelist has come to see as complicity with evil. Apparently acknowledging this line of thinking, Ngugi is known to have said that he now finds The River Between rather embarrassing as the product of his pen.

Completely dissatisfied with his former lack of critical vigour in handling social problems, Ngugi has taken 'his satirical whip' and in Devil on the Cross, 'raps'[20] his society for complicity with evil. Ngugi's anger in this, his latest novel, is tempered 'with pathos verging on tears, but often with bitterness, though this is hardly discernible because below it flows compassion and a zest for life,'[21] as Ime Ikiddeh informs us. In this avowedly Marxist novel the author uses the satirical mode to undermine and 'expose the profligacy of the elite,' expecting in the words of Cook and Okenimkpe that 'the wider audience will eagerly take part in the satiric unmasking of their overlords.'[22] The burlesque self-exposure of the 'demi-gods' of neo-colonialism provides a suitable stylized fictional setting for a straightforward didactic statement. In Devil on the Cross Ngugi sets out to teach. It is a didactic work in two senses: first, in exposing in farcical terms the economic 'malaise' obtaining in Kenya. The slapstick farce of the self-exposure of the 'thieves' in what amounts to a thieves' den is intended as corrective education. Secondly, the novel is didactic in providing a new education for women, who, Ngugi argues, belong to the most oppressed class.

Ngugi's writings are a continued search for a solution to the problems that bedevil society. Presenting the Gikuyu myth and ancestry as a living reality, the novelist has chronicled, as Clifford Robson says, 'Gikuyu life and customs, conveying the atmosphere and character of Gikuyuland.' Beneath all this lies a zest for life, informed and carried through by Ngugi's belief that change for the better is possible. In this regard, therefore, his 'writing is a continued search to realize the promise suggested by the sacred grove'[23] in The River Between.

CHAPTER I

NOTES

[1] Micere Mugo, Visions of Africa: The Fiction of Chinua Achebe, Margaret Laurence, Elspeth Huxley and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978), p.21.

[2] David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of His Writings (London: Heinemann, 1983), p.1.

[3] L.S.B. Leakey, Mau Mau and the Kikuyu (London: Methuen, 1954), p.10.

[4] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Homecoming (London: Heinemann, 1972), p.48.

[5] Abdul R. JanMohamed, Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa (Amherst: Massachusetts University Press, 1983), p.184.

[6] R. Sanders and J. Munro, 'Tolstoy in Africa' interview with Ngugi, reproduced in Ba Shiru (Vol. 5, 1973), p.22.

[7] L.S.B. Leakey, Mau Mau and the Kikuyu (London: Methuen 1954), p.95.

[8] George Padmore, Pan-Africanism Or-Communism? (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1972), p.225.

[9] Janheinz Jahn, Who's Who in African Literature: Biographies, Works, Commentaries (Tiibingen: Horst Verlag, 1972), p.255.

[10] Leakey, p.ix.

[11] Leakey, p.95.

[12] Ngugi, Homecoming (London: Heinemann, 1972), p.50.

[13] Ngugi, in The Writer in Modern Africa ed. Wastberg, Per (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1968), p.25.

[14] Ime Ikiddeh, Forword to Homecoming, p.xii.

[15] Ngugi, Homecoming p.xv.

[16] Ikiddeh, Forword to Homcoming p.xi.

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